

One Size Fits All?

A study of the relationship between universalism and particularism in the UN's peacebuilding mission in Liberia

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IV

Abstract

This study is an examination of the relationship between universalism and particularism as it manifests itself through peacebuilding processes in Liberia. Issues of UN legitimacy are explored by investigating the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) and the interplay between the particularistic Liberian culture and values on the one hand, and the UN's objective of introducing/implementing so-called universal standards through peacebuilding missions in post-conflict theatres on the other.

Peacebuilding actors have been heavily criticized for utilizing a liberalizing 'one-size-fits-all' template for implementing peace in war torn countries without taking into consideration the local context of the host country, and for 'teaching' war-torn countries what an 'appropriate' way of organizing a state, and what a 'correct' normative framework of states should look like. These factors have been argued to delegitimize the peacebuilding endeavour.

This study shows that, while there is merit to the 'accusation' that the UN applies a fixed layout when designing peacebuilding missions, when deployed however, the organization shows more pragmatic flexibility, and accommodates customary institutions and structures on the ground.

Additionally, the empirical findings indicate that legitimacy to a higher degree is tied to priorities, than what critical scholars have acknowledged so far. After fourteen years of civil war, it appears that the local population in Liberia was more concerned with security and having basic needs covered, than with the UN's principles being in line with those of Liberians'.

Findings furthermore show that the UN's 'universal' human rights component at times 'clash' with some Liberian practices, such as clitoridectomy, and attitudes towards the rights of LGBTi peoples and children's rights. Through friction, these 'clashes' produce a variety of dynamics. While human rights can be used as a tool of empowerment for those whose rights are being violated, they can also cause local resistance towards what is being perceived as Western imposition of norms – especially if these norms are seen as infringing on values that people regard as being defining features of their identity. The findings also suggest that different methodologies of the UN affect the extent to which the organization's objectives are being perceived as imposed, and that the UN does impose some human rights – those categorized as *harmful traditional practices*, while others are left untouched.

Preface

My heartfelt thanks-o¹ to all of my informants for sharing your experiences, viewpoints and time. This thesis could not have been written without your contributions.

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Trine Kjær Christensen

Oslo, 14th December 2014

¹ As you say in Liberia

Abbreviations and acronyms

AFL - Armed Forces of Liberia

CPA - Comprehensive Peace Agreement

CSO - Civil Society Organisation

ECOMOG - ECOWAS Monitoring Group

ECOWAS - The Economic Community of West African States

LURD - Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy

NGO - Non-Governmental Organisation

NRC - Norwegian Refugee Council

NTGL - National Transitional Government of Liberia

PBO - Liberia Peacebuilding Office

ULIMO - United Liberation Movement for Democracy in Liberia

UN - United Nations

UNMIL - United Nation mission in Liberia

UNOMIL- United Nation Observer Mission to Liberia

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“The white man’s burden”

– Rudyard Kipling

Take up the White Man's burden--

Send forth the best ye breed--

Go bind your sons to exile

To serve your captives' need;

To wait in heavy harness,

On fluttered folk and wild--

Your new-caught, sullen peoples,

Half-devil and half-child.

1 Introduction: Why reinvent the wheel?

A few years back in a (rather loud, some might say) debate with a fellow student, we discussed the ethical dimensions of introducing liberal market democracies via liberal peacebuilding interventions. He argued that ‘we’ in the West have ‘invented the wheel’ and that there are no forceful counterarguments as to why we should not try to ‘help’ people in other countries by establishing the same democratic institutions, human rights and economic arrangements as we have. After all, why reinvent the wheel?

As the anecdote above illustrates, this liberal peacebuilding paradigm is characterized by a certain mindset. This mindset, despite its good intentions, contains ethnocentric features. Ethnocentrism refers to the practice of assessing or rating other cultures² on the basis of one’s own cultural perspective, which may lead to biases of perceiving other cultures as ‘inferior’ imitations of one’s own (Eriksen, 1998, p. 29). This line of thought, which is dominant in foreign policy studies, political science, and much political journalism is heavily based on evolutionist expectations that cultural normative differences can be understood as a function of time. The mindset that some people were so ill-fated as to have entered the 21st century with social, cultural and political institutions that belongs to an earlier era continues to be prevalent (Moran, 2006, pp. 15-16). This attitude furthermore assumes that *all* societies across the planet *wants* or *identifies* with these liberal democratic institutions, human rights and economic arrangements, and that the norms³ they are founded upon resonate universally. Due to this ethnocentric mindset, liberal peacebuilding has been argued to be an expression of the ‘white man’s *new* burden’. As described in Rudyard Kipling’s poem, *The White Man’s Burden*, the colonial era was characterized by the assumption that imperialists had a moral responsibility to educate the ‘un-civilized’ populations in the ‘underdeveloped’ colonies (Kipling, 1899). Similarly, peacebuilders today have been described as attempting to ‘civilize’ and ‘teach’ populations in host countries what constitutes ‘right’ or ‘appropriate’ behavior (Paris, 2002).

1.1 A study of the relationship between universalism and particularism

² Culture refers to those socially transmitted patterns of behavior that is characteristic of a particular social group (Keesing & Strathern, 1998, p. 15). It can be defined as: “The sum total of knowledge, attitudes and habitual behavior patterns shared and transmitted by members of a particular society” (Linton, 1940).

³ Norms can be defined as either explicit or implicit societal rules for what kind of behavior is allowed and what kind is not (Eriksen, 1998, pp. 72, 110).

This study investigates this relationship between universalism and particularism. According to the ideology of universalism which underpins the liberal peacebuilding paradigm, universal moral standards exist, and truth, moral, and values are seen as being independent from cultural diversity (Langlois, 2007, p. 345). In terms of *liberal* Universalism, this means that certain ideals such as human rights and democratic values should apply for all people, in all states, at any time. In this sense, the approach is not necessarily rooted in empirical universality, stating that these values *already* exist in all societies, rather, it is a normative claim that the international community should *strive* to implement them on a universal basis (Langlois, 2007, p. 345).

In contrast to universalism, the anthropological concept of particularism argues that one must seek to understand societal values, morals, and aspirations on the basis of the society's own premises and its cultural contextual environment. From this perspective, there are no meaningful overriding universal principles applicable to all societies, and instead one must accept diverse worldviews and perceptions of suitable strategies and priorities (Ruud, 2009, pp. 89-90).

With this theoretical point of departure, this study sets out to investigate the relationship between these two opposites by examining the empirical case of the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL). The objective is to try to understand the interplay between the particularistic Liberian culture and values on the one hand, and the UNs objective of introducing/implementing so-called universal standards through peacebuilding missions on the other. The reason for this focus on universalism and particularism stems from the concern that if the host country of the peacebuilding missions does not reflect the structures, institutions and norms sought introduced by the UN, to what extent will they then be sustained after the mission has terminated? This leads us to one of the main concepts around which the thesis will revolve - *legitimacy*.

Legitimacy in peacebuilding can be divided into three different categories: 'sociological legitimacy' which refers to whether there is evidence of consent by the people affected; 'normative legitimacy' which concerns whether peacebuilding meets moral standards of international politics; and 'legal legitimacy' or 'legality': which refers to whether it follows international law (Lidén, 2005, p. 11). When a peacebuilding operation is launched, it requires formal mandate from the host-country in order for peacebuilding missions to be legal according to international law, hence legal legitimacy should be unproblematic in this context. The normative legitimacy of peacebuilding is paradoxical as it appears to require a temporary benevolent autocracy imposing democratic structures from above (Lidén, 2005, p. 11). Investigating sociological in this thesis, entails looking at whether the norms, values and institutions sought implemented by UNMIL are in line with the Liberian

context. Do Liberians identify with the UN's peacebuilding efforts? Do the institutions and norms sought implemented resonate with the particular Liberian framework?

Legitimacy in peacebuilding in the current literature tends to be presented in dichotomies: either as selfish-less, charitable philanthropy; or as a neo-colonialist extractive endeavor, striving to educate backward populations and keep the discontent global poor silent and passive by handing out petty missions (Lidén, 2005, p. 5). Correspondingly, little attention has been devoted to the complexity and nuances in the perception of the host-population towards the intervening mission. Recipient populations are presented as passive *tabula rasa*, or blank slates of paper upon which to write down so-called *universal* norms and values. This thesis aims at addressing these shortcomings by showing that local populations are active in negotiating, considering, modifying and engaging with the outside world, and that culture, identities, values and norms are products of dynamic processes (Barth, 1969). They evolve as an outcome of *friction* (Tsing, 2005) between the local and the global. As the portmanteau *glocalization* (a combination of globalization and localization) (Robertson, 1995) exemplifies, cultures and localities produce new outcomes of its local conditions in response to globalization. Through these processes local actors, institutions and structures are, as this study will show, either connected or disconnected, strengthened or weakened, empowered or alienated.

A look into the concept and purpose of peacebuilding is necessary in order to provide a basis for the coming discussion.

1.2 UN peacebuilding

Despite the common usage of the terms *peacebuilding* and *peacekeeping* in UN contexts today, they are nowhere to be found in the UN Charter. During the Cold War, traditional peacekeeping was authorized under Chapter VI of the UN Charter and involved only the deployment of a neutral and lightly armed interposition force following a ceasefire in order to discourage a renewal of military conflict. Neutrality and impartiality served as bedrock principles in these early peacekeeping missions, and they were usually deployed with the consent of the parties involved in the conflict.

The immediate aftermath of the Cold War was characterized by a profound belief that the world was heading towards perpetual peace and stability (Duffield, 2001, p. 1). The UN, having in many ways been paralyzed for 40 years, was thought finally to be in a position where it could act in

accordance with the purpose it had been established for- namely to maintain international peace and security. Consequently, UN peacekeeping missions increased both in number and scope.

The post-Cold War optimism nevertheless quickly evaporated in the face of the unspeakable horrors in Somalia, former Yugoslavia and Rwanda. To put it bluntly, the increase of civil wars, ethnic conflicts and genocide in the decade succeeding the end of the Cold War brutally pointed out the limits in traditional peacekeeping in establishing self-sustainable peace in post-conflict environments. Not surprisingly, the capacity of the UN to realize the overall objectives of the Charter was seriously questioned, and as a result the international community increasingly called for, at best, a re-visioning of UN peace operations, and at worst, a potential divorce.

In response to the recognition that peacekeeping alone could not generate self-sustainable peace, the term *peacebuilding* was first formulated in 1992 by then United Nations Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali in the UN report *An Agenda for Peace*. In the report, Boutros-Ghali defined peacebuilding as “action to identify and support structures which will tend to strengthen and solidify peace in order to avoid a relapse into conflict (Boutros-Ghali, 1992, p. 5).

The term peacebuilding is a source of considerable ambiguity,⁴ but the following definition nevertheless attempts to grasp the multifaceted nature of the concept:

Peacebuilding attempts to encourage the development of the structural conditions, attitudes and modes of political behavior that may permit peaceful, stable and ultimately prosperous social and economic development. Peacebuilding activities are designed to contribute to ending or avoiding armed conflict and may be carried out during armed conflict, in its wake, or as an attempt to prevent an anticipated armed conflict from starting. Peacebuilding activities fall under four main headings: to provide security, to establish socio-economic foundations for long-term peace, likewise to establish the political framework of long-term peace, and to generate reconciliation, a healing of wounds of war and justice (Dan Smith, 2004, p. 20).

In practice, what this means is that the UN gradually has developed an approach that combines traditional peacekeeping functions with humanitarian and peacebuilding activities. This new approach involves not only the supervision and monitoring of cease-fires, but it also adds something new by actively contributing to the rebuilding of the state and social structures (Franke, 2006, p. 7). This has generated new descriptions such as ‘multi-dimensional peacekeeping’, ‘second

⁴ For example, at UNMIL’s webpage, it is stated in a fact sheet that: “The United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL is a multidimensional *peacekeeping* operation comprised of military, police and civilian personnel.” (<http://unmil.unmissions.org/Default.aspx?tabid=3935&language=en-US>). However Liberia is listed as one of the countries on the *Peacebuilding* Commissions agenda (<http://www.un.org/en/peacebuilding/>), which could lead one to infer that UNMIL is a peacebuilding mission.

generation peacekeeping’ or ‘complex peacekeeping operations’ (Pugh, 2004, p. 47). When looking at the evolution of peacebuilding missions, they have in that sense moved far beyond involving “simple” crisis management to including an ambitious thoroughgoing transformation of political, social, security, and economic institutional structures in the recipient country (Fjelde & Höglund, 2011, p. 11).

Considering the ambition of these peacebuilding operations, it is not surprising that certain aspects of the peacebuilding agenda has generated controversy.

1.3 The crux of the matter

Since the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations published the “Brahimi report” in 2000, the term peacebuilding has been explicitly tied to that of liberalization. What liberalization means in the political realm, is:

(...) democratization, or the promotion of periodic and genuine elections, constitutional limitations on the exercise of governmental power, and respect for basic civil liberties, including freedom of speech, assembly, and conscience. In the economic realm, liberalization means marketization, or movement toward a market-oriented economic model, including measures aimed at minimizing government intrusion in the economy, and maximizing the freedom for private investors, producers, and consumers to pursue their respective economic interests (Paris, 2004, p. 5).

The ideological assumptions underlying the peacebuilding paradigm is that political, social and economic liberalization will promote international as well as domestic peace by adding the newly liberalized state to the pacific union of liberal democracies. This ideological approach of UN peace missions is often legitimized in scientific terms with reference to the influential “democratic peace thesis” (MacMillan, 2004). The assumption that the only legitimate form of governance is constituted by liberal democracies, free market economies, and jurisdictions respecting human rights has pervaded the strategies of all recent large-scale missions (Paris, 2004).

These liberal values and presumptions that underpin the peacebuilding paradigm have, however, been criticized for two interrelated reasons. Firstly, the core normative dimensions of the liberal peacebuilding model has been criticized for being embedded in Western norms and values, and that peacebuilding missions serve as a tool for transmitting or even ‘imposing’ these values to

countries emerging from civil war (Duffield, 2001; Paris, 2002; Pugh, 2004; Richmond, 2004)⁵. According to this view, peacebuilding is an extremely ambitious experiment in social engineering, an experiment that entails transferring Western prototypes of social, political, and economic organization into war-torn states in order to control civil conflict. The result of this approach is that the outcome will be peace on the premises of the external liberal actors, rather than the premises of the citizens of the host-countries (Liden, 2005, p. 5). In other words, the vision of the nature of peace projected from the inside is given less weight than the vision and aspiration of the international community as envisioned from the outside (Richmond, 2004, p. 91).

Secondly, critics accuse international actors of utilizing a ‘one-size-fits-all’ recipe for implementing peace, without taking into account the history, culture or context of the recipient country. Some authors have stated that local perspectives are often viewed as obstacles for peacebuilding, which must be overcome, rather than as a source of knowledge crucial for legitimate and durable peacebuilding, and that peacebuilding may even increase instability rather than reduce it (Barth, 2008; Berdal, 2009; Duffey, 2000; Fjelde & Höglund, 2011; Jarstad, 2008; Lidén, Mac Ginty, & Richmond, 2009; Paris, 2002). Both of these criticisms revolve around the topic of anchoring peacebuilding locally. The first, however, deals with the normative *aim* of peacebuilding, whereas the latter address the more practical and technical *means* of peacebuilding (Romtveit, 2013, p. 24).

To sum up there are a few main points to draw from this which will give a sound foundation for further investigation into the interplay between the UN peacebuilding agenda and the local context. Firstly, the aim of peacebuilding in essence is to transform societies and the underlying structural dynamics that give rise to conflict, so that past problems do not reoccur. This process of change cannot be left to chance but requires direct and concerted action (Stiglitz, 1998). Secondly, this endeavor should take its point of departure in means and aims of liberalization. Thirdly, what characterizes the mandates of these missions is that the intervening agencies do not only have extensive conflict-management mandates, they are also authorized to intervene extensively in the national affairs of the recipient country⁶. The crux of the matter of the current debate, in that sense, is that, on the one side peacebuilding is presented as “the quintessence of altruism and benevolence

⁵ For more on this topic, see: (Bellamy, 2004; Bellamy & Williams, 2004; Chandler, 2004; Chopra, 2000; Duffield, 2001; Paris, 2002, 2004; Pugh, 2004; Richmond, 2004; Zisk Marten, 2004).

⁶ UNMIL’s original mandate as set out by Security Council Resolution 1509 (2003) for example enables UNMIL to: «assist the transitional Government, (...) in reestablishment of national authority throughout the country, including the establishment of a functioning administrative structure at both the national and local levels», to: «assist the transitional government in developing a strategy to consolidate governmental institutions, including a national legal framework and judicial and correctional institutions», and to «assist the transitional government in restoring proper administration of natural resources» (United Nations, 2003, p. 4).

in international politics, and on the other side; accounts of peacebuilding as pure imperialism in disguise” (Lidén, 2005, p. 5).

1.4 Research question

With the debate above serving as a starting point, this thesis explores the dynamics between universalism and particularism, and the legitimacy of UN peacebuilding, and hence, the research question, which guides this study, is:

How does the UN’s approach to peacebuilding relate to the Liberian context? And what factors are important in establishing UN legitimacy?

In order to investigate how the UN’s approach to peacebuilding relates to the Liberian, a triangulation of methods is applied involving the merging of anthropological micro- and political science macro-perspectives, as well as including data provided by various Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs). A mix of these methods allows for a comprehensive understanding of the incentives in decision-making at the international political level, as well as an understanding of how the implementation of these decisions may affect the lives of those in question at a local level. This allows for local voices to be heard, while at the same time placing these voices within a scientific context. Another way of putting this is to say that peacebuilding operations constitute an interface where the dynamics between universalism and particularism expresses itself on the ground. Working side by side, on the one hand, the UN and the ‘international community’ is present in the field representing ‘universal’ values, while on the other hand, the locals who live there may potentially be more influenced by local tradition and values, but who –in a globalized world - may also be influenced and inspired by external forces. In this context, it should be noted that when referring to ‘the locals’, there are enormous discrepancies within the population. The UN was indeed invited by the Liberian government, hence in the eyes of the political elite of Liberia, the legitimacy issue of the UN should be relatively unproblematic. It is the *different* perceptions of the UN in Liberia, that will tell us something about the interplay between universalism and particularism.

Hence, in order to get an understanding of the interplay between these dynamics on a more grounded platform the main methodological approach applied to investigate the research question was the conduction of an anthropology-inspired qualitative case study of UNMIL. Data was gathered during a 2.5 months fieldwork in Liberia from October – December 2013, as well as during an internship lasting from February-July, 2014, in Ghana. Seventeen informants comprised

of current and former UN employees, ‘ordinary’ Liberians, Liberians working for/with UNMIL, academics, Civil Society Organizations and other NGO employees were interviewed.

1.5 Composition of the thesis

This chapter has presented the background in which the research question is rooted, and introduced the general debate, which sets the stage for the forthcoming analysis. The second chapter presents the theoretical underpinnings that constitute the basis for the analysis. The first section discusses the UN’s ideological foundation for launching liberal peacebuilding missions. The following section puts various aspects of this ideology, and some of the upshots of applying it, under scrutiny. Subsequently, chapter three addresses a range of issues relating to the methodology, inter alia issues of validity and reliability, as well as other questions concerning the execution of fieldtrips to post-conflict theatres. Chapter four introduces a background for understanding the political and cultural milieu the UN is operating in, in Liberia. Chapter five opens the analysis and presents the empirical findings, while Chapter six summarizes the analysis and findings of this study.

2 Theory: Liberal peacebuilding missions: Why? Why not?

The aim of this chapter is to contextualize the following empirical analysis, in addition to placing the research question within a theoretical framework.

This contextualization will take place by looking into the theoretical, ideological and empirical underpinnings of liberal peacebuilding, and illustrate how these ideological notions have served and continue to serve as the basis for legitimizing liberal peacebuilding interventions. Following this section, the counter-position will be presented. This will include questioning the legitimacy of the theoretical, ideological and empirical underpinnings of the liberal peacebuilding paradigm. The anthropological analytical prism that will serve as a basis for the following analysis will be presented, before summarizing and discussing what implications dubious ideological underpinnings and normative justifications for engaging with liberal interventions have in terms of legitimacy.

2.1 Justifying liberal peacebuilding: The Democratic Peace Thesis

Engaging with liberal peacebuilding operations is, *inter alia*, rationalized by a profound reliance on the influential democratic peace thesis, which postulates that democratic forms of governance are more peaceful than other regime types both *vis-à-vis* each other and domestically. The confidence in the democratic peace thesis is directly tied to the founding ideological principles of liberalism. Liberalism champions freedom of the individual, universalism, egalitarianism, meliorism, human rights, democracy, scientific rationality, constitutionalism, democracy, and limitations on the powers of the state. The more these founding principles pervade and guide social relations both internally and externally the more pacific they are expected to be (MacMillan, 1998). In addition, liberal scholars have claimed that market capitalism best promotes the welfare of all, by most efficiently allocating scarce resources within the society (Burchill, 2009, p. 57). Allegedly, in such systems even losers maintain a sense of justice whereby the incentives for domestic instability is decreased. Thus, in sum, what this means is that liberalists expect that political arrangements that reflect and cultivate these liberal ideals will be inherently peaceful.

Much empirical research has been conducted which supports the claim that democracies rarely-if ever, wage war against each other. Research has similarly concluded that market democracies are

less prone to intrastate disturbances (Paris, 2004, p. 42). In fact, not many theories in international relations are as well-entrenched as the democratic peace thesis. Jack Levy, for example, argues that the democratic peace thesis is the closest political science has come to law-like generalizations (Levy, 1988). Considering these findings, political and economic liberalization would appear to be a plausible approach for consolidating internal peace in war torn states. Referring directly to these studies, Former UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan, voiced his confidence in the democratic peace thesis in 2000, when stating that: "There are many good reasons for promoting democracy, (...) when sustained over time, it is a highly effective means of preventing conflict, both within and between states." (Annan 2000 in Paris 2004, p. 42). Confidence in the democratic peace thesis is in that sense expressed at the highest of levels within the UN, which undoubtedly grants it a degree of credibility and legitimacy in the eyes of the international community.

The underlying causes for why democracies are generally more peaceful than other regime-types are contested. Constructivist schools of thought have offered various explanations: Some accredit various domestic institutions and norms for putting in place constraints to the use of force; some have argued that warfare is simply becoming increasingly unacceptable; others have argued that a common identity across national borders has evolved, whereby compelling countries from waging wars against 'like-minded' nations (Gartzke, 2007, p. 168). Other explanations refer more directly to the core hypothesis as formulated by Kant, which asserts that if states share the three features of representative democracy, adherence to international law and organizations, and advanced commercial integration and interdependence, they would, through mutually reinforcing dynamics, create peace. This postulation was reaffirmed by Russett and Oneal's comprehensive analysis *Triangulating Peace. Democracy, Interdependence, and International Organizations*. Their findings offer credible evidence that both democratic virtues and transnational trade relations serve as significant constraints on the use of force, whereby making war an irrational and unthinkable tool of interstate politics (Russett & Oneal, 2001). Meanwhile Erik Gartzke, attributes the peaceful mechanisms guiding the relations between states - not to the regime-type, but to capitalism. According to his modified explanation, peace, rather than being a result of democracy, is the product of economic development and capitalist market integration (Gartzke, 2007, p. 166). He also argues that democracy and peace may have the same potential causes -namely development and capitalism (Gartzke, 2007, p. 182). All things considered, regardless of the difficulty in mapping out the complicated causal linkages between the form of regime or governance, levels of economic integration, interdependence, and development, liberalists will argue that altogether these various

components have a role to play in facilitating peace. Based on this, it makes sense for the international community to engage in peacebuilding efforts, including processes of political and economic liberalization in countries emerging from civil war.

2.1.1 Liberal internationalism

The threat of an excluded South producing international instability through conflicts, cross-border criminal activities and terrorism has increasingly become part of a new security framework (Duffield, 2001, p. 2). Hence in response to growing fears of these transnational phenomena a certain strand of liberalism – liberal internationalism, holds that liberalism and liberal institutionalism should be promoted transnationally and that international governance structures should be democratized (Dunne, 2001). From that perspective, it is not only the states that should be subjected to political liberalization, but also the overall international environment. Liberal internationalism has in that sense merged the ideas of liberal statebuilding and the democratic peace thesis, which has gradually translated into peacebuilding throughout the 1990s (Paris, 1997). Through this prism, peacebuilding becomes not only the aim, but also the means of expanding the peaceful zone of states, through transforming war-shattered countries (Doyle, 1997). As Doyle puts it: “peacebuilding has the role of reconstructing societies in liberalism’s divine image. By integrating states in the liberal Garden of Eden, this Garden is both expanded and further secured against the ‘iliberals’ that lurks outside its borders” (Doyle, 1999). Hence, through expanding the liberal pacific union, the world could reach the state of affairs of what Kant described as perpetual peace (Kant, 1992).

2.1.2 Normative justifications

Human rights have also played a crucial role in justifying peacebuilding interventions. Most multi-dimensional peace operations are armed with a robust human rights mandate, and all staff in peace operations have the responsibility to ensure the protection and promotion of human rights in their work (United Nations). Human rights cut across the security, the humanitarian, and the development dimensions. As a consequence both the military, the police, and the civilian components of missions, along with the UN agencies in the UN country team in the recipient country are expected to integrate human rights in their tactics and activities (Castellan, 2012, p. x).

While it is tempting on the basis of the above to conclude that liberal peacebuilding interventions are a bulletproof formula for how to install global peace on earth, and that it is motivated by

international humanitarian solidarity, a deeper look into the practice is necessary before ascribing it with the status of being a perfectly legitimate endeavor.

2.2 Legitimacy issues in liberal peacebuilding

Having presented arguments in favor of the legitimacy of liberal peacebuilding, we now turn to arguments opposing this legitimacy.

2.2.1 Local ownership

One of the reasons for why the liberal peacebuilding paradigm has been criticized for suffering from legitimacy issues is tied to lack of local ownership in missions. Local ownership in post-conflict peacebuilding refers to: “the extent to which domestic actors control the design and the implementation of political processes” (Donais, 2009, p. 3). Current peacebuilding efforts have increasingly been criticized for not devoting sufficient consideration to local realities and for failing to accommodate and adhere to the priorities of the population in question. Domestic concerns are deprioritized in favor of international political interests when missions are formed, and local actors are not being engaged with in open dialogue. Local viewpoints are regarded as hindrances which must be ‘conquered’, rather than as a necessary informative source, capable of facilitating durable solutions (Donais, 2009, p. 8). Richmond captures the issue when writing that:

This has created practices in which states (and organizations which profess to understand what peace is) are able to intervene in conflict in order to educate others in their ways of peace, without necessarily renegotiating the peace frameworks that have arisen from the recipients’ experience, culture, identity or geopolitical location. (...) The question of what peace might be expected to look like from the *inside* (from within the conflict environment) is given less credence than the way the international community and its organizations and actors desire to see it from the *outside*, and moderates searching for peace from within the conflict environment tend to expropriate Western models in their search for a solution (Richmond, 2004, p. 91).

From this perspective, the agenda and way forward identified by the host country are subjugated to make space for the agenda formulated by the international community. As mentioned, there is of course a need for a formal mandate from the host-country in order for peacebuilding missions to be legal according to international law. However, when facing massive international assistance in the wake of a civil war, a rejection on political grounds is unlikely. Thus, due to lack of leverage, the host country leaves its future in the hands of international actors.

The sceptics towards this tutelage argue that peace cannot simply be imposed by outside forces. It must be cultivated from the inside, customized to the host country, and based on allowing the population of the recipient country to identify their own needs and the appropriate action to meet these needs. While external assistance may be necessary in order to put an end to violence and to nurture the initial establishment of democratic institutions, however, it impedes local ownership by taking control over political processes. In the words of Virginia Page Fortna: “the very thing that can help ensure lasting peace, outside intervention, often reduces the political space available for the emergence of home-grown, domestically legitimate and accountable political institutions” (Fortna, 2008, p. 45).

Without the support from the indigenous population, there is a serious risk that peace processes will either break down after a peace agreement has been reached or after the mission withdraws. Smothering out domesticated initiatives might reduce the local capacity for self-governance and produce a dependency that can prove difficult to get rid of, thereby undermining the long-term progress towards durable peace and self-government (Fjelde & Höglund, 2011, p. 21). Because peacebuilding operations per definition have an end-date where sovereign responsibility must be returned to the host government, the need to anchor peacebuilding efforts locally cannot be overstated. The national judiciary system, the police, the military and the government will not function without the population’s engagement after the drawdown of the mission. Hence, the problem of not engaging local actors is that they are the ones who maintain processes the mission has breathed life into after the intervention has departed. If these actors do not identify with, or perceive the efforts as being legitimate and reflecting local priorities, this compromises the entire peace process. This brings us to the paradox of introducing democracy from the outside.

2.2.2 The paradox of democracy from the outside

Article 21 (3) of the Universal Declaration for Human Rights state that “The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority or government” (United Nations, 1948). There is however, a fundamental inconsistency in that implementing democracy by way of peacebuilding missions appears to entail a temporary benign autocracy that is imposing quasi-democratic arrangements (Liden, 2005, p. 11). In the words of Larry Diamond:

All international postconflict interventions to reconstruct a failed state on democratic foundations confront fundamental contradiction. Their goal is, in large measure, democracy - popular representative and accountable government in which “the people” are sovereign. Yet, their means are undemocratic – in essence, some

form of imperial domination, however temporary and transitional. (Diamond, 2005, p. 16).

The upshot of this paradox captures the issue of normative legitimacy in a nutshell, as it raises concerns in terms of whether it is inherently inconsistent with the central liberal principles of moral freedom, democratic self-legislation and freedom from the authority of other states (Liden, 2005, p. 38). Imposing liberal democratic institutions, which supposedly should be founded on democratic virtues such as serving the will of the people in cases where the population does not identify with these institutions, seriously jeopardizes the credibility of the very principles the concept of democracy is built upon.

This paradox not only applies to the legitimacy of introducing democracy by undemocratic means, it also addresses the contradiction in trying to secure sovereignty by compromising the very rights of a state that *makes* it sovereign. The experiences of Kosovo and Serbia can for example illustrate how some of the rights and privileges that are usually associated with a sovereign state and territorial integrity have been challenged by a peacebuilding intervention (Semb, 2012, p. 187). According to the first regulation of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK): “All legislative and executive authority with respect to Kosovo, including the administration of the judiciary, is vested in UNMIK and is exercised by the Special Representative of the Secretary General” (Semb, 2012, p. 190). In effect this meant that UNMIK had the powers of the state and that the Special Representative for the Secretary General (SRSG) had unlimited powers. In that sense, this arrangement fell short of any standard of democratic governance in which the SRSG, Hans Hækkerup was accountable to the population over which he exercised close to unrestricted authority (Semb, 2012, p. 190).

The same paradox is mentioned in the context of Liberia, where Bøås and Stig writes that: “It is an ironic paradox that the international community expects local actors to govern in accordance with the principle of participatory democratic rule, while they themselves do not feel obligated to adhere to the very same principles” (Bøås & Stig, 2010, p. 285). In that sense, the intervention not only takes over, it is also exempt from all answerability. Liberia was of course constituted as a democracy long before the deployment of any peacebuilding mission, however, at the end of the two civil wars the country’s institutions, infrastructure and economy were in ruins, and political decentralization, mistrust towards government authorities, and lack of justice and impunity continue to be prevalent (Neumann & Schia, 2012, pp. 23-24). Hence, the peacebuilding paradox is equally relevant in scenarios as the one in Liberia.

The point here is that there are inescapable contradictions involved in seeking to “establish the conditions for legitimate and sustainable national governance through a period of benevolent foreign autocracy” (Chesterman, 2004, p. 1). Establishing the initial conditions favorable for the emergence of democracy, simultaneously thwarts the conditions that ensures that it thrives in the long term (Fortna, 2008, p. 45).

Hence, to sum up, the paradox of peacebuilding is that it entails: “*intervention* for the establishment of *sovereignty*, *indoctrination* for the sake of *enlightenment* and *political coercion* in the name of *political freedom*” (Liden, 2005, p. 12). This line of self-contradictive actions naturally induces the question of credibility and legitimacy. If liberal peacebuilders do not adhere to the very bedrock principles that liberal peacebuilding is founded upon, will they be taken seriously by the recipient country? Or, to put it differently, if the “role models” do not practice what they preach, how can they expect for others to do so?

2.3 The “problem” of cultural issues

Along similar lines, another problem compromising the legitimacy of the liberal peacebuilding paradigm, is that most interventions are analyzed from the perspective of the intervening powers with little attention paid to the cultural realities on the ground. Not understanding the cultural environment in which the mission is being deployed and not comprehending the worldview of the recipient population can seriously undermine the prospects of a successful mission. While the above example referred to normative legitimacy, however, this refers to sociological legitimacy.

Tamara Duffey (2000) for one shows how (mis)understanding the cultural context in a conflict theatre can distance the population from the mission and undermine sociological legitimacy of the mission. In the case of Somalia for example, she illustrates how lack of cultural understanding started from the highest level of decision-making in the UN at the very beginning. Although the Special Representative to the Secretary General urged the UN *not* to send troops until conditions had been negotiated, sending troops was exactly what the UN did. The warlords were against a UN military intervention, and the presence of troops and use of force (as mandated by UNSCR 814) was likely to intensify the fighting and cause major confrontations with armed Somalis. In that sense, not taking into account the context can endanger people, intensify the situation and exacerbate existing tensions (Duffey, 2000, p. 156). Similarly Lidén points out that: “Having little conception of state sovereignty, modern bureaucracy, written covenants, formal participation structures and linear, sequential notions of time it is unsurprising that traditional societies found,

and still find, Western versions of peace alien” (Lidén, 2009, p. 623). It is likely that this phenomenon helps explain why so many peace agreements break shortly after having been signed. If the population does not relate to Western methods of creating peace, the peace put in place may appear rather ‘alien’.

A continuing problem worth mentioning in this context is also that liberal peacebuilding operations tend to take the existence of functioning state as a given (Liden, 2005, p. 35). As the anthropologist Fredrik Barth points out, in the case of the mission in Afghanistan, it appears that American authorities were never aware that Afghanistan has always been a state-less society, and that it would be difficult for the US to create a new state structure without any existing foundation for that way of organizing a territory (Barth, 2008, p. 63). This criticism has also been directed towards the Security Sector Reform in Liberia, which also follows the notion of a prototypical Western state. Like many other African countries, Liberia has a dual justice system. The international community firmly supports the statutory system remaining largely unaware of the customary system, through which some 90% of all cases are dealt (Vinck, Phuong Pham, & Kreutzer, 2011). Liberia’s democracy furthermore has a long history of corruption, exclusion, abuse and violence. With draconian hands, the True Whig Party ruled Liberia as a one-party state uninterrupted for more than one hundred years, before experiencing fourteen years of devastating civil war, and two regimes that were no less repressive than that of the True Whig Party’s. Additionally, Liberia’s politics has suffered from what is popularly referred to as ‘tribalism’, conflicts along lines of ethnicity and religion (Boås, 2005; Ellis, 1999), and patrimonialism. Hence, Liberia has never existed as a prototypical democratic Western state and that trying to ‘rebuild’ something that has never existed is problematic, especially when the approach does not comprehend the context in which it is being implemented (Boås & Stig, 2010, p. 292).

2.3.1 Jeopardizing the relationship with the local Population

Sustainable peacebuilding and democratization processes are completely dependent on the engagement of the local population (Jarstad, 2008, p. 24). Cultural insensitivity may produce mistrust, estrangement (Duffey, 2000, p. 157) and what the political anthropologist David Kilcullen has described as *societal antibodies* whereby referring to local resistance emerging in response to Western intervention (Kilcullen, 2009, p. 41). Thus, in order to tackle a conflict, avoid making the local population hostile towards the missions, and to implement sustainable conflict resolution measures, it is fundamental to understand core virtues in the society and the forces that are driving the conflict.

Fredrik Barth also exemplifies this by describing how the intervention forces in Afghanistan appear from the perspective of the Afghan population. Considering their boots, armored vests, their body language they look bizarre, inhuman and alien. The troops shoot randomly (because they cannot tell the difference between insurgents and civilians), they burst into peoples' houses, they arrest guests in front of the husband, wife and children of the house – the most humiliating practice possible according to the centuries old customary law – the *pashtunwali*-code. They command and boss about bystanders – as if they were slaves or servants rather than free people (Barth 2008:72). In this regard, the forces become an expression of Afghan weakness, subjugation and superiority, which violently oppose the *pashtunwali* values of bravery, vengeance, and hospitality pervading the Afghan cultural framework (Kilcullen, 2009, p. 75).

There are multiple points to draw from this. Firstly, cultural narratives and values that are deeply rooted historically are fundamental to consider in conflict resolution in a given society. Underlying causes for conflict are rarely universal, on the contrary they are particular and are unlikely to be solvable by applying a homogenous recipe for conflict resolution. Secondly, making use of “what is already there” in terms of institutional framework, traditions, practices and values makes sense. Building on political institutions such as clans, chieftaincies, kingdoms that are already present is an opportunity to anchor the peace locally, which also makes the process more legitimate and the peace less porous. Similarly, utilizing local conflict solving mechanisms such as Hawaiian *ho'oponopono*, Kalahari *xotla*, Inuit song duels, Indian *panchayats*, Pakistani *Jirga* system, Afghan Pashtun code, Tongan *kava* drinking circles (Duffey, 2000, p. 145) may be a way of engaging with conflict resolution that the population can relate to and identify with. Overriding cultural resources rather than working *with* them is likely to create animosity towards the mission, which will hamper the involvement of the population. This can undermine the prospects for sustainable and durable peace after the mission's departure.

2.4 Universalism and human rights

Human rights are placed at center stage in peacebuilding operations, and most multidimensional peacebuilding operations are, as mentioned above, equipped with a solid human rights mandate.

However, before uncritically settling on the undisputable status of human rights, a deeper look into the concept of universalism is called for. Firstly, considering the variety of empirical cultural diversity across the globe, the validity of empirical universality has been questioned. The assumption that human rights reflect different cultural, geographical and historical contexts have

become so prevalent in some parts of the world, that its empirical validity is rarely questioned. Secondly, these so-called *universal* human rights have been criticized for having a Western bias. Hence, this following section examines what the potential upshot of this lack of representativeness and cultural bias might be with regards to sociological legitimacy in UN peacebuilding.

2.4.1 Universal validity?

The concept of human rights finds its legal framework in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights from 1948, which contains the term *universal*, whereby supposedly claiming to be universally valid. In line with The Free Dictionary the term validity is here defined as being “based on or borne out by truth or fact” (The Free Dictionary, 2000), which in this case would imply that human rights are culturally representative empirically speaking and at a universal level. The assumptions that values and ideals can be considered as being independent of culture, that they *resonate* across various cultural and historical backgrounds, and that all individuals in all societies at any point in time *identify* with these values have been scrutinized from various positions. The anthropologist Alison Dundes Renteln for instance, investigated around one hundred different societies and concluded that there is an astonishing amount of varieties when it comes to opinions of what is right and wrong and that there seems to be no pattern suggesting that morals and normative beliefs cohere across cultures (Eriksen, 1998, p. 310).

It is important in this regard to acknowledge that although the status of human rights may be undeniable in *some* areas of the world, there continues to be areas where the concept of human rights is still largely unheard of, and where the normative framework is very different to that of the West. At times, a right that is important in certain cultural settings may be regarded as needless under other circumstances (Griffin, 2008, p. 49). Clashes between rights and cultural social norms may also occur: typical methods of expressing one’s opinion as part of *freedom of speech* through actions of demanding, claiming, and protesting could be frowned upon as discourteous in specific cultural fora (Nickel, 2007, p. 27). There can also be an inconsistency between the rights-based rules and the normative rules, which are followed by the society in question. Sharia Law for instance can be more representative of the prevailing norms of a society than the norms underlying international law.

Furthermore, the concept of universal human rights is a product of a political undertaking. Universal human rights were not a fixed package that transcended to humans from some natural authority. The various components or ‘rights’ of what today is referred to as the universal human

rights are unrelated. On the contrary, human rights are dynamic. The composition, which was agreed upon at a certain stage in time, has changed since its initiation, rights have been added, and interpretations have varied. In other words, human rights adapt to changing circumstances and historical developments (Høstmælingen, 2005). The concept of universalism has also evolved over time and applied to different categories of people. Initially the term referred to men solely and only gradually did it begin to incorporate women, people of various religious beliefs, workers, and people of differing racial backgrounds (Moyn, 2010, p. 32).

The aim here is to spell out the problematic aspects of the UN having a robust mandate to promote human rights through peacebuilding interventions, when the validity of universalism is dubious. If UN human rights have been termed *universal* with the purpose of claiming to be empirically universally representative, as the above discussion has shown, this can be disproved. If the aim of labelling human rights universal was to *make* them universal or to *implement* them globally, little respect is devoted to the consideration that cultures differ normatively, and that expecting to be able to accommodate and encapsulate an extensive spectrum of cultural varieties is highly ambitious and could even produce local resistance. Hence, either way, the concept of universalism is thorny.

2.4.2 Western bias in human rights

This political endeavour of creating human rights has additionally been criticized for being a Western product deeply rooted in Western normative tradition and history. As Anthony Langlois notes, the values underpinning the human rights paradigm can be traced back to Western political and cultural history, the renaissance, the protestant reformation and to a very high degree back to the time of European Enlightenment (Langlois, 2007, p. 345). Historically, it is rooted in the context of cycles of war, diplomacy, state-building, imperialism, and colonialism (Richmond, 2009, p. 559), and as such it is intrinsically embedded in Western notions of the state, democracy, and the preconditions for development (Fjelde & Höglund, 2011, p. 17). Another way of illustrating this would be to envision the scenario where human rights had been an African, South American or Asian political project - it is difficult to imagine that the outcome had consisted of the exact same priorities in terms of what should constitute a right. This argument can be exemplified by the work of Teruhisa Se and Rie Karatsu (Se & Karatsu, 2004) who in response to the inability of the existing human rights model to appeal to the Japanese cultural context developed an alternative model by constructing a conception of human rights derived from Japanese culture.

The rhetoric of human rights also bear witness of a Western bias. Human rights parlance is characterized by references to principles such as equality, solidarity, progress and development, which are reasonable ways of formulating political claims and political determinations focused at authorities. However, this rhetoric may be nonsensical in other social and cultural environments. When claiming a right it presupposes that the authority being addressed is that of a modern nation-state, and it follows that this type of rhetoric is unlikely to yield the same resonance in societies where other collective identities and norms are prevalent (Ekern, 2003, p. 282). In other words, the human rights concept only adapts to a state-centered setting, despite the fact that in many societies (including Liberia) the main entity around which social organization revolves is the local community (Ekern, 2003, p. 273).

It seems that the nature of Universalism is a paradoxical one. Universalism is both what grants the UN with a widespread perception of legitimacy, but it is also the notion of universalism that provides one of the most convincing arguments against this legitimacy: Ideally, all human beings, in all societies, in all of the world, and at all times, *should* be able to identify with the UN formulated human rights. However, considering the cultural diversity across the globe, an incomprehensible variability in terms of perceptions of what constitutes morals, a significant challenge for the human rights paradigm lies in the objective of accommodating a variability of cultural normative particularities. The consequences of claiming universal applicability, when in reality these norms seem to be deeply embedded in certain Western geographical, cultural and historical contexts, is that societies characterized by other cultural norms are unlikely to identify with the scheme that they by law are required to adhere to. Even more so, this may produce negative results in the shape of lack of legitimacy and even creating the perception that the human rights paradigm is characterized by ethnocentricity and imposition. As Linklater so bluntly puts it: “The point is that those that believe they have cracked the moral code will want to trample on the rights of others – like the missionaries who tried to talk the natives out of their sinful ways, causing serious mental and bodily harm in the process” (Linklater, 2002, p. 139). Hence, the perception that the West is actively seeking to export or impose these values upon other societies may create resistance and counter-reactions.

Thus in sum, the question is whether the empirical invalidity of the term *universal*, the Western bias, the clashes between rights and cultural and social norms, and the empirical non-representativeness of all societies in the concept of human rights jeopardize or undermine the legitimacy of the human rights component in peacebuilding operations (this will be discussed in the analysis in section 5.4).

2.5 Peacebuilding: White man's (new) burden?

This following section engages with the nature of Western ethnocentrism and shows how it has been expressed through the colonial era's 'civilizing mission,' and how peacebuilding may be an expression of a contemporary 'White Man's Burden'.

Western ethnocentricity was particularly expressed through the crusades of the colonial era. As in the poem by Rudyard Kipling, whites (generally referring to the colonial powers of Europe and the United States) were seen as having the obligation to rule over, and encourage the cultural development of people with differing cultural backgrounds (Kipling, 1899). The objective of this endeavor was to 'teach' 'civilized' ways of life until they themselves were capable of assuming their position in the world economically, socially and culturally. It was an expression of a moral duty to help 'the poor/colored' in their struggle to better themselves, disregarding of whether this assistance was called for by the people in question.

The question is did this outlook ever change?

Peacebuilding missions, according to Roland Paris, serve as a mechanism by way of which countries emerging from civil wars are 'taught' how states ought to organize themselves domestically. By reconstructing war torn countries in accordance with the liberal vision, standards for 'appropriate' behaviour is transferred from Western democracies to 'quasi'⁷ states in the periphery. In this light, Paris argues that peacebuilding can in fact be understood as an updated and more benign variation of the *mission civilisatrice* - the above mentioned colonial assumption that European imperialists had the 'duty' of 'civilizing' dependant populations in the colonies.

Paris identifies four mechanisms by which international peacebuilders have sought to promote liberal market democracies in post-conflict theatres. Firstly, they have had a huge influence on the content of peace-agreements while they are being drafted in the aftermath of a civil war. In every recent peacebuilding case, peace settlements were undertaken in the presence of outside parties, who encouraged recipient countries to include the objective of political (and in some instances, economic) liberalization directly into their agreements (Paris, 2002, p. 642). Secondly, international agents provide experts to local parties to guide the process of political and economic liberalization. Thirdly, another way of influencing the processes of the post-conflict agenda has been for

⁷ Jackson's term "quasi"state refers to: "states that are recognized as sovereign and independent units by other states but that cannot meet the demands of empirical statehood, which requires the capacity to exercise effective power within their own territories and the ability to defend themselves against external attack" (Dokken, 2008, p. 33).

international agencies such as the IMF and the World Bank, to impose ‘conditionalities’. This requires states to carry out certain financial and political reforms in exchange for economic aid. Often it has involved privatization of state-owned enterprises, the lowering of government subsidies, removal of wage and price controls, and the lifting of regulatory controls and barriers to foreign goods and investment. The fourth mechanism Paris has identified as a way of ‘civilizing’ war torn countries, is for peacebuilders to promote liberal values by way of performing quasi-or proxy governance. This involves international actors functioning as ‘stand-ins’ for the local governments lacking the capacity to perform administrative tasks themselves (Paris, 2002, pp. 644-645).

Paris’ account of peacebuilding indeed gives associations to an enterprise, which manifests new expressions of the ‘White Man’s Burden’. In that sense, the international community does not allow war shattered countries to be *inspired* by Western ways of organizing a state and a society, and let them *decide* whether they want to use this model. On the contrary, when a country has agreed to “collaborate” with the international community, the international community ends up dictating the way forward by applying the good old ‘carrot and stick’ approach of offering rewards in the shape of aid (an offer most war-torn countries cannot afford to decline), and forcible incentives in form of aid conditionality. These types of mechanisms compromise both normative and sociological legitimacy: Normative legitimacy because tools such as aid conditionality and proxy-governance fall under the category of implementing democracy by undemocratic means, and sociological legitimacy, because little attention is devoted to whether there is evidence of consent by the people affected.

2.6 Dodgy motives?

An even more critical account of the liberal peacebuilding paradigm is provided by a much more critical school of thought⁸. This particular group of authors argue that peacebuilding is in fact an attempt to mask the ‘true’ selfish intentions of the West, whose real incentives are to i) maintain predominance; ii) exploit resources of the developing world, or iii) avoid the negative effects associated with exclusion of developing countries on the developed world.

⁸ Roland Paris has identified what he calls a “hyper-critical” school of scholars who regards liberal peacebuilding as an inherently destructive and illegitimate endeavor. Such scholars present liberal peacebuilding as “doing more harm than good” and as Western imperialism seeking to subjugate the societies hosting the mission (Paris, 2010)

The concern for ‘peace and security’ seen through this prism, refers to the concern the effects of economic exclusion of the South can have on the North. Uncontrollable refugee flows, transnational criminal activity, epidemics, human trafficking, drug trafficking, smuggling of weapons, and terrorism are the *real* worries of the North rather than concerns for the *people* in the excluded South (Duffield 2001:2). Threats associated with an excluded South is in that sense the key factor determining the international security- and development agenda. Samuel Huntington for instance argues that the West in effect is utilizing international institutions, military power and economic resources to run the world in ways that will maintain Western predominance, protect Western interests and promote Western political and economic values (Makinda, 2007, p. 374). Thus, rather than aiming at promoting international peace and security *globally*, the work of international organizations, such as the UN, reflects the preferences and interests of powerful *Western* states. Peacebuilding in this regard serves the instrumental purpose of ensuring the self-preservation of this exclusive transnational network of governmental and non-governmental actors, who are “hypocritically preserving their self-interests in the name of global peace, security and development” (Lidén, 2009, p. 616). Paris exemplifies this empirically by noting that the fear of refugee flows could have influenced the engagement of the United States in peace making in Haiti (Paris, 2002, p. 652).

Seen from this more structural perspective, liberal peacebuilding outright strengthens the existing order and consolidates the status quo. Of course the counterargument states that countries ravaged by war have benefited from the relief aid and military protection provided, but in the words of Michael Pugh: “they pay a price for that assistance in their dependency on wealthy parts of the world and their subjugation to the demands of an economic globalization that may benefit the minority of entrepreneurs but undermines the self-sufficiency of the majority” (Pugh, 2004, p. 54).

Pugh argues that deconstructing the role of peace support operations in fact suggests that they “sustain a particular order of world politics that privileges the rich and powerful states in their efforts to control or isolate unruly parts of the world”. Peace support operations, in other words, serve a narrow, problem-solving purpose, which is to ‘doctor’ the dysfunctions of the global political economy within the framework of liberal imperialism” when resistance against this structure is encountered (Pugh, 2004, p. 39). In other words, the capitalist hegemony is trying to contain the instability sourced by the system’s inability to benefit large parts of the world, and peace support operations deal with the manifestations of the instability that this produces. This ‘riot control’ is, in his opinion, not only based on the selfish objective of wanting to keep a lid on the on the dissatisfaction with the structural world order in the global South, it is furthermore

camouflaged in humanitarian rhetoric, presented as a victim-rescuer model and armed with a design to safeguard human rights (Pugh, 2004, p. 39 & 48). The term 'peace' in peace support operations almost per definition gives associations to ethically sound moral grounds; it refers to the humanitarian ethical response to suffering, and the moral concern for order and security in the international system. Hence, not only does this humanitarian alibi promote moral values and reinforce the superiority of the liberal ideology, it also creates a distance to military operations and legitimize the use of force. A relevant empirical example that could illustrate this type of concealed selfish objectives presented as benevolence could be that of the invasions of Libya and Iraq:

An invasion of Libya under a humanitarian mandate would serve the same corporate interests as the 2003 invasion and occupation of Iraq. The underlying objective is to take possession of Libya's oil reserves, destabilize the National Oil Corporation (NOC) and eventually privatize the country's oil industry, namely transfer the control and ownership of Libya's oil wealth into foreign hands (Chossudovsky, 2011).

The intentions underlying the cases above can of course be discussed and debated extensively and it is difficult to establish exactly what drives decisions to intervene. Even though assessing motives behind peace operations is an interesting topic, it is both too broad to include in this thesis but more importantly it is not of great significance. The point is not to determine whether peacebuilding is an expression of intervening countries wanting to access oil fields or avoid uncontrollable refugee flows etc. The point is rather that these are very real *perceptions* of what is driving the peacebuilding agenda, and that these viewpoints may influence the extent to which liberal peacebuilding is *perceived* as legitimate.

Hence, to sum up, when approaching peacebuilding from this angle, the enterprise is not perceived as being primarily driven by liberal ideals or by humanitarian concerns as such, but more by Western security and geopolitics. It is stimulated by the interest of the 'donor' rather than the 'recipients'. It is an endeavor that serves to increase the marginalization of societies in the periphery while disguising its egoistic objectives in philanthropy and idealism. Structurally, it reinforces a world order that hampers the possibility for radical improvement in the life conditions of the populations in Third World countries. Once again, this leads to the question of what kind of challenges that are associated with these perceptions in terms of legitimacy.

2.7 Counterproductive results?

Previously this thesis accounted for the benefits of liberal democracies, development and marketization in terms of peace, and showed how the quest for these underpins the liberal peacebuilding paradigm. While it is true both that liberal democracies have not waged war against each other, and that nondemocratic countries are more likely to experience internal violence than democratic ones, certain moderations should be considered. Empirical evidence *does* indicate that war has never been fought between two *stable* democracies, but it *also* shows that countries containing both democratic and autocratic features –the anocracies- are statistically more prone to experience internal violence and civil wars than both consolidated democracies and autocracies (Hegre, Ellingsen, Gates, & Gleditsch, 2001, p. 33). In other words, although democracies are more stable and less violent both internally and externally, the route whereby countries transition from civil war to becoming a well-established market democracy is often associated with violence and instability (Suhrke & Chaudhary, 2011, p. 250). In that sense democratization processes do not seem to increase the duration of post-conflict peace in the short-term, but only in the medium-and long-term (Heldt, 2011, p. 54).

Roland Paris was one of the first scholars to put the peacebuilding paradigm under scrutiny by arguing that it is derived from faulty assumptions about the perks of rapid liberalization. As he puts it:

Paradoxically, the very process of political and economic liberalization has generated destabilizing side effects in war-shattered states, hindering the consolidation of peace and in some cases even sparking renewed fighting. In Rwanda and Angola, for example, political liberalization contributed to the resurgence of violence; in Bosnia, elections reinforced the separation of the parties rather than facilitating their reconciliation; and in Mozambique, El Salvador, and Nicaragua, the effects of economic liberalization have threatened to reignite conflict. At best, the liberal internationalist approach to peacebuilding has generated unforeseen problems. At worst, peacebuilding missions have had the “perverse effect” of undermining the very peace they were meant to buttress. (Paris, 1997, p. 56).

In *At War's End* (2004) he continues along the similar lines by examining the political goals and guiding principles of the fourteen major international peacebuilding missions that were launched between 1989 and 1999 and concludes that attempting to transform war-shattered states into liberal democracies with market economies can backfire badly. What he finds is essentially that the case studies he investigates indicate that the process of either political or economic liberalization, or both, produced destabilizing effects that hampered the consolidation of peace. In some cases they exacerbated societal tensions, contributed to a revitalization of violence or contributed to refabricate the historic causes of violence (Paris, 2004).

Based on historical empirical analysis, evidence furthermore suggests that imposing democracy on another country through interventions usually fails. In an examination of forty-three cases of imposed democratic regimes between 1800 and 1994, Andrew Enterline and Michael Greig found that 63 percent failed (Enterline & Greig, 2008). United States-led intervention especially tends to fail at imposing democratization in other states. Bruce Bueno de Mesquita and George Downs, for example, reported that since World War II, the United States have intervened more than thirty-five times in developing countries. Only in Columbia did a stable democracy emerge within ten years, after the Americans decided in 1989 to engage in the war on drugs. That is a success rate of less than 3% (Mearsheimer, 2011, p. 5).

Hence, the sources above indicate that promoting democracy through interventions rarely are very successful in establishing consolidated and stable democracies and that they might even yield reverse effects of what was intended. Rather than generating peace, liberal interventions can produce conflicts and increased instability.

These discoveries have consequences for the democratic peace thesis and liberal peacebuilding, as they casts doubt on the reliability of the well-established peace-through-liberalization theory that lays the foundation for the strategies applied today. Applying the democratic peace thesis actively to real empirical cases is a risky business that may shake the grounds further beneath populations that have already experienced years of instability. Even though it may be perceived as a given that populations are willing to pay the price of continuing down a tremulous path in order to reach the end goal of consolidated peace, populations are rarely consulted in terms of whether they are open to face the troubles that processes of democratization may entail.

2.8 Analytical prism

As the above sections show, there are both strong arguments for and against liberal peacebuilding. Both accounts however, lack attention devoted to the active role of the host population of peacebuilding missions. Liberal peacebuilders *assume* that liberal market democracies are wanted globally, and interestingly, critics scrutinizing liberal peacebuilders for failing to take into account local perspectives, they themselves neglect investigating attitudes on the ground towards the missions. For instance, by arguing that “a deconstruction of the role of peace support operations suggest that they sustain a particular world order of politics that privileges the rich and powerful states in their efforts to control or isolate unruly parts of the world” (Pugh, 2004, p. 39), Pugh leaves little space for taking into account active voices within the societies in questions, who may

either support this world order, or who may be actively opposing it. Along the same lines, when writing that peace and liberal democratic models are ‘installed’, ‘imported’ (Richmond, 2004, p. 83), or that standards of appropriate behavior are ‘transmitted’ (Paris, 2002, p. 637), Richmond and Paris neglect various nuances when discussing the unequal power relationship between the intervention and the host-country. Other quotes, such as “From this perspective, peacebuilding resembles an updated (and more benign) version of mission civilisatrice, or the colonial-era belief that the European imperial powers has a duty to ‘civilize’ dependent populations and territories” (Paris, 2002, p. 637) show that little attention is brought to the constructivist notion that ideas and norms are dispersed. People, according to the constructivist school, are not just passive receivers, but play a dynamic role in interpreting, developing, and evolving norms and ideas. Similarly, when stating that: “UN allows for interference or intervention in the anomalies of a global liberal order, thereby starting to build a liberal peace ‘from the outside’” (Lidén et al., 2009, p. 591) Richmond, Mac Ginty and Lidén are presenting it as if recipients of peacebuilding missions are entirely passive in the peacebuilding processes (Schia & Karlsrud, 2013, p. 234). Both the critics and the universalists take a dogmatic approach- one assumes that liberal peacebuilding is perfectly legitimate, the other assumes that its perfectly illegitimate. Neither stops to ask.

This thesis aims at addressing this rigidity by regarding peacebuilding through an anthropological analytical prism. Analyzing the dynamics between UNMIL and the normative and institutional framework of Liberia from an empirical point of departure can contribute with insights, and complement these accounts with constructive nuances.

As the social anthropologist Fredrik Barth points out, there is good reason to question the persistency of ethnic groups and culture. Ethnicity and cultures, he argues, are not exempt from transformation, and ethnic groups are not rigid and bounded entities (Barth, 1969, p. 9). On the contrary, ethnicity and culture are the results of interaction and shared interfaces where identities arise and are negotiated. Hence, it is in the meetings *between* cultures that cultures emerge. Along similar lines, but seen from more of a macro-perspective, Anna Tsing describes how “all human cultures are shaped and transformed in long histories of regional-to-global networks of power, trade and meaning” (Tsing, 2005, p. 3). By using the term *friction* as a metaphor, Tsing illustrates that rather than understanding culture as being determined by *tensions* between the global and the local, the interplay between the two plays a crucial role in *creating* culture. Globalization in that sense does not necessarily signify a ‘clash’ of cultures, but it generates movement, action, and effects through social interactions. “Rubbing two sticks together” she notes “produces heat and light; one stick alone is just a stick. As a metaphorical image, friction reminds us that heterogeneous and

unequal encounters can lead to new arrangements of culture and power” (Tsing, 2005, p. 5). Cross-cultural and long-distance encounters in this light are crucial in forming everything we know as culture and making up the contemporary world we live in. Similarly, the anthropologist Mary H. Moran notes that the ‘political’ in Liberia is not just a hegemony imposed from the center over the local community, but a product of the interaction between them (Moran 2006, p. 7). “Culture” she claims “is a dynamic process of making meaning from ongoing events, not a fixed position on an evolutionary scale” (Moran, 2006, p. 19).

The objective of applying an anthropological prism, is to expose systematic fallacies that are prevalent in the existing tendency of regarding culture and norms as premordialist, rigid and static and to force any reader to acknowledge the fluidity of societies and the notion that things are forever in motion. Norms and values are the result of the intertwining of modernity and tradition, and the local, national and global (Piot, 1999). Anthropology can shed special light on said gap in the academic literature, and help grasp the tricky issue of legitimacy, which is nigh on impossible to capture quantitatively, or only by looking at the theoretical dimensions of peacebuilding, without getting out of your armchair.

With this as an analytical backdrop, this study sets out to investigate the attitude towards the mission in Liberia. What are the potential upshots of the justifications for launching international liberal peacebuilding operations in post-conflict environments not holding water and the entire enterprise being pervaded by frailties and controversial aspects, and how is this likely to materialize? What are the consequences of liberal peacebuilding agencies hypocritically not adhering to their own principles in terms of legitimacy? To what extent will a population sustain and nurture processes initiated by these operations after the withdrawal of the mission, especially if these processes do not reflect the worldview of the population? How will a host-country react to initiatives that undermine institutions, traditions and values that constitute proud cultural and societal pillars? These questions encapsulate the legitimacy problem of liberal peacebuilding in its current form and serves as a backdrop for the following analysis of *How does the UN’s approach to peacebuilding relate to the Liberian context? And what factors are important in establishing UN legitimacy?*

2.9 Conclusion

So far, liberal peacebuilding interventions have been put under scrutiny for failing to ensure local ownership and unwillingness to tailor the intervention to the needs and the context on the ground. They have been criticized for not taking the history of the host country into account, for neglecting

the importance of specific cultural traits and for not making use of the resources, knowledge, structures and institutions that are in place in the post-conflict theatre. Rather than utilizing a bottom-up approach based on identifying and designing appropriate cultural-sensitive initiatives, a one-size-fits-all recipe is implemented. The peace installed has been described as an ‘alien’ peace that does not resonate with the realities on the ground and as a peace that the recipient population does not relate to or identify with. Liberal values, norms and rights that have been promoted and presented as *universal* have been disproved in terms of validity on grounds of not being empirically globally representative. On the contrary these values and norms are rooted in Western history and philosophical tradition. Not only is this ‘universalism’ characterized by a Western bias, it is also ethnocentric. Non-Western countries are perceived as unsuccessful ‘wannabes’ trying to imitate the optimized exemplary prototypical Western states. In order to meet this ineffectiveness of copying Western states, they themselves have taken on the ‘responsibility’ of ‘educating’ non-Western countries in what constitutes ‘fitting’ institutions and norms in the 21st century. Paradoxically, this involves trying to introduce *democracy* by *undemocratic* means, securing *internal* state sovereignty by having *external* actors assume control, and building *local* capacity by allowing *foreign* agencies to take over. The endeavor has furthermore been accused of being a deceptive expression of neo-imperialism in disguise. Finally, liberal peacebuilding is founded on the democratic peace thesis, but applying this hypothesis directly in reality has proven problematic in the sense that there is a discrepancy between the intentions of the democratic peace thesis and the actual outcome of applying it on the ground. Liberalization in the name of peace may backfire brutally and yield the reverse effects of what was originally envisioned.

Highlighting the arguments of these critics does not entail that they are ‘right’, and denouncing the legitimacy of the liberal peacebuilding paradigm on this basis is premature. As shown above, the empirical evidence and support in international politics suggest that the case for liberal peacebuilding continues to be a strong one. Furthermore, despite the frailties of peacebuilding, the alternative of not engaging with peacebuilding at all, is not a viable solution either. War-torn societies cannot afford the reconstruction of their countries themselves. However, both critics and universalists have overlooked local voices when discussing the legitimacy of UN peacebuilding. This thesis is in many ways a mouthpiece that allows for people on the ground to voice *their* perspectives on the issue.

3 Methods

This chapter aims to reflect the research design as well as challenges related to the research process itself. Firstly, the strength and shortcomings of a case study design will be illustrated on the basis of its ability to investigate causal mechanisms as seen in the light of the nature of this thesis' research question. Related to this, special focus will be devoted to the perks and challenges of conducting a 2.5 months ethnographic fieldwork in Liberia and undertaking interviews in a cross-cultural setting. Following this section, aspects of internal and external validity, reliability, operationalization of theoretical concepts will be examined. Additionally, reflections on various challenges associated with the research process will be highlighted and problematizations of the terms "the locals" and "the West" will be put forth.

3.1 Case study

For a long time case studies and statistical studies have been described as two opposing and distinct research designs, each with their respective merits and frailties. Case studies have been described as inadequate for testing theories, considering that results affirming or rejecting a hypothesis on the basis of a single case will suffer from problems of representativeness (Gerring, 2007, p. 42). However, despite the inability of single case studies to generalize to other cases, they still have a significant scientific value in the sense that they perform exceptionally well when dealing with micro-level investigation. While statistical analysis may be capable of identifying correlations, one of the benefits of case studies is, in the words of Gerring that they: "may allow one to peer into the box of causality to locate the intermediate factors lying between some structural cause and its purported effect" (Gerring, 2007, p. 45). In other words, quantitative research may establish the existence of a correlation, while qualitative research establishes *why* there is a correlation and *how* it unfolds within a given case.

The overall objective of a research design is to guarantee that the research question can be answered in the most judicious way possible (de Vaus, 2001, p. 16). While a phenomenon such as legitimacy is hard to measure qualitatively, it may prove even harder to measure quantitatively. Understanding of the dynamics between universalism and particularism in peacebuilding is limited and a case study can help shed light on how these challenges are expressed and manifests on the ground.

An additional benefit of being capable of tracing causal mechanisms in this way, is that it allows one to do cultural sensitive research by paying attention to the local context (Gerring, 2007, p. 48).

This is of great significance in the case of this thesis, as paying attention to existing structures, institutions and values and relating these to the principles of universalism can give a more nuanced picture of the causal processes producing legitimacy-problems. The following analysis relies on a triangulation of methods: the utilization of more than one approach in order to increase confidence in the findings (Denzin, 1989). Methodological triangulation in this thesis includes an analysis of academic literature concerned with peacebuilding in general and about Liberia in particular, analyzing data material from different organizations working with peacebuilding in Liberia, as well as analyzing 17 interviews with members from the international community and from Liberia.

Firstly, as mentioned above, considering that the topic of this thesis centers around concepts such as legitimacy, and the relationship between universalism and particularism, a qualitative approach is judicious, as these concepts are not easily quantifiable. Secondly, while a considerable amount of research pertaining to the theoretical aspects of UN legitimacy exists, little has been written taking its point of departure in empirical studies of attitudes and perceptions on the ground. For this reason, I chose to undertake an ethnographic fieldtrip to Liberia.

3.2 Ethnography

Carrying out a fieldwork is beneficial for a number of reasons. It will, *inter alia*, allow the researcher to get an understanding of the context, people's intentions and motivations, and the underlying meanings of actions and opinions (Wedeen, 2010, p. 257). It will permit the researcher to understand where they are coming from both literally and figuratively, and it will expose the researcher to information 'hidden' in social interaction, gossip, rumors, jokes, informal speech and other kinds of meta-data, which is not articulated explicitly, but which emerge in other ways (Fujii, 2010).

As the purpose of the thesis is to account for perceptions of UN legitimacy, there were important methodological perks of undertaking an ethnographic fieldwork of several months' duration. Firstly, it facilitated accessibility to informants that would otherwise not have been possible. Before venturing to Liberia, I had attempted to contact various UN officials, the Chief of Public Information, UNMIL's Spokesperson etc. without the efforts yielding any significantly fruitful results. Another benefit of being present in the field in this regard was that access to informants eventually got better as the 'snow-ball effect' began to kick in and a process of networking slowly led me in the direction of other informants, organizations and written sources.

Secondly, as accounted for in the theory chapter, the UN has been criticized on grounds of creating peace on the premises of the external liberal actors, rather than on the premises of the citizens of the host-countries (Lidén, 2005, p. 5). Conducting a field trip to Liberia constituted an attempt at trying to mitigate this tendency by emerging myself into a situation, which allowed me to channel the opinions of Liberians whom otherwise most likely would not have been heard. As MacClancy states:

Anthropology helps to empower the alienated and give voice to the otherwise unvoiced. (...) Anthropologists, by listening to and then transmitting the words of the marginalized, the poor, the ignored, can bring highflying approaches back down to the ground and reintroduce the concerns of ordinary people into the equations of policymakers (MacClancy, 2002, p. 13).

The danger of armchair science is that it becomes solely the work and voice of academics. Detailed ethnographic investigation can in that sense map out striking discrepancies between the perceptions of academics, local individuals, and political elites, and in that way provide a more nuanced picture of the attitudes on the ground (Megoran, 2006).

It should be noted that I was ‘only’ able to conduct a two and half months fieldtrip, which in many ways is a rather short, at least seen from an anthropological perspective. As Stewart writes: “the less time for fieldwork, the less the ethnography will be an ethnography” (Stewart, 1998, p. 20). The more time spent in field the deeper the contextual understanding about local histories, relationships and culture. Hence, while this fieldtrip did shed light on perceptions towards the UN’s mission in Liberia, conducting a *long-term* fieldtrip however is recommendable in order to follow up on the findings of this thesis.

3.3 Interviews as methods

International actors are central in determining the direction of UN missions and providing funding for peacebuilding. At the same time local actors are often overlooked in the peacebuilding literature, hence in this study the aim was to increase internal validity by getting both perspectives and as such to get a balanced account of UN legitimacy. In total 17 interviews were undertaken with both international and local actors. Most were conducted in Monrovia, while five were conducted in Gbarnga in Bong County, which is placed northeast of Monrovia in central Liberia. Several of the interviews included several interviewees. Ten interviewees were Liberian, six were European or North American, and one was Ghanaian. The six European and North American were UNMIL employees, two Liberians were from the Liberian Peacebuilding Office, one was from the Regional

Justice and Security Hub, one was a biology student, three were from Bong Peace Committee, one was from Bong Women for Development, three were from the Norwegian Refugee Council, and one Liberian and the Ghanaian were from the Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre in Accra, Ghana⁹.

I chose to apply semi-structured interviews in order to enable a flexible and casual conversation that allows for follow-up questions and probing. This means that I developed a set of questions to serve as guidelines for the interview, but without following these strictly. This approach provides the researcher with the possibility of requesting the informant to elaborate on topics that he or she brings up, but that the researcher had not considered (Thagaard, 1998, p. 89).

3.3.1 On Dynamics between interviewer and interviewee

As Fujii so importantly acknowledges: “How informants identify researchers can determine the amount or level of access the researcher can gain” (Fujii, 2010, p. 233). On various occasions, I ascribe personal attributes, such as being a young white woman, as being a key factor in determining how a situation was to unfold and which answers I would get in an interview. An example of this would be an interview I conducted in Gbarnga with the CSO, Bong Women for Development. As my field notes (10.12.13) exemplify, perceptions about me clearly affected the way the interview-situation unravelled:

(...) I told them that the topic was about the dynamics between the norms and institutions the UN was trying to implement and Liberian traditional institutions and culture. Pressured by time, I tried to come up with specific examples of issues it could be interesting to have women's view on, such as FGM (female genital mutilation) in the Sande bush schools, and domestic violence. Would they for example prefer that domestic disputes were handled by the police, rather than by traditional means? Did they support FGM and Sande Bush Schools because they are tradition and have played a huge role in teaching girls how to become women over generations? Or, did they not support it (FGM) because it is associated with certain dangers, or because it is against human rights?

Basically what happened was that one woman got out of her chair, walked into the middle of the circle of women, took a deep breath, raised her voice and gave a long speech about how “you white people you come here and you tell us what to do” while pointing her finger at me. She mentioned

⁹ The latter two are experts on peacebuilding both in theory and practice, however, it should be noted that these were being interviewed as private persons, and not as representatives of KAIPTC. Hence, their statements should not be confused with official opinions of KAIPTC.

children's rights and how the UN is telling people not to use their children for labor, but that they basically have to, because they work so hard and things don't add up without the help of the children. That they can no more get water from wells far away, or get their children to gather wood. I would almost say that she seemed pretty hostile to me. She made me feel like she thought that I obviously don't know what it means to work hard, and didn't understand her circumstances.

At some point I said that perhaps since they had their meeting to attend to, and because I couldn't take notes from what 30 women (who all speak at once) are saying, so if anyone had time the morning after, maybe I could have an interview with just a few of them. The reaction, (which I kind of saw coming, I could have bit my tongue off just when I asked the question), was that they made a real statement out of telling me that they were ALL BUSY WORKING. (...).

The point of this anecdote is to illustrate that it appears that ideas held by this Liberian woman about Western women to a high degree influenced the interview. When saying “you white people” I was put into a category that she associated with a certain kind of behavior and it appears that it was this behavior she was responding to more than to the me per se, considering that I had not spoken to her on earlier occasions and as such never had the “chance” to “tell her what to do”. In a cross-cultural environment it is perhaps even more difficult to bridge or escape this kind of prejudices, so one way of mitigating these biases that the researcher may inflict upon the data simply in virtue of personal characteristics, is to attend to it with an attitude of reflexivity. As Megoran puts it: “researchers must probe how their personal agency influenced the research results” (Megoran, 2006, p. 628).

Depending on whom I was interviewing, the way I presented the topic of the thesis would furthermore affect the answers I got. Using phrases such as “the UN has been *criticised*”, or “the UN has been *accused of imposing* norms and institutions” could give associations to the hyper-critical school of peacebuilding authors who state that liberal peacebuilding does more harm than good and is an expression of Western imperialism (Neumann & Schia, 2012, p. 15). Hence, this kind of presentation of the theme could provoke a defensive reaction on the part of UN employees who would ‘protect’ their organization. This highlighted the importance of underlining that I was not as such part of that school, but that the aim was rather to investigate to what degree these criticisms also applied to Liberia, and how the UN sought to address these challenges. A similar experience was made in relation to one Liberian interviewee. I was asking into the topic of UN human rights that “clash” with social norms in Liberia. The informant noted that the term “female mutilation” (as opposed to female circumcision or clitoridectomy), was a negatively loaded word that indicated

hostility to this Liberian traditional practice. In that sense, choosing wordings carefully and applying a sensitive and neutral parlance may hamper the urge for informants to take on a defensive position. In general, both clitoridectomy and other topics such as the rights of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender/Transgender and Intersexed (LGBTI) appeared to make some informants feel uneasy or uncomfortable. I experienced that the best way to go about it was to signal that I was asking out of genuine curiosity based on a desire to acquire insight into the state of affairs and know what the realities on the ground were like, not because I wanted to judge or hold them accountable for their opinions.

3.4 Validity

Validity refers to the extent to which a concept, a result or a measurement is sound and corresponds truthfully to the real world. It is assessed in terms of whether it measures what it claims to be measuring and whether it scientifically answers the question it is intended to answer. As such, it points the researcher in the direction of which methods to use in order to measure the phenomenon in question. The concept of validity can be divided into *internal* and *external* validity. Internal validity refers both to the degree to which a causal inference is reasonable and minimizes systematic errors and bias, as well as the extent to which the empirical analysis is characterized by cohesion and consistency. Related to internal validity is *construct* validity, which refers to the extent to which a case study enables a better operationalization and measurement of key concepts. External validity addresses the extent to which the conclusions can be applied to other broader unstudied populations (Gerring, 2007, p. 43). Consequently, statistical studies enjoy a high degree of external validity, and case studies have a reputation for enjoying a high degree of internal validity.

Regarding internal validity in this case study a few aspects pertaining to geographical representativeness and operationalization of terms require special attention.

3.4.1 Internal validity: Geographical representativeness

UN missions have often been described as being relatively successful in the capital and the surrounding areas, while not succeeding properly in decentralizing the reach of the peace initiatives in rural areas. Thus, providing data from only the capital of Monrovia, could lead to a serious bias in terms of representativeness of informants. The peace initiatives may look very promising in Monrovia, while they do not resonate with people only a few hours away. Hence, in order to

increase internal validity and ensure representativeness of local informants, interviewing people both from the center as well as the rural parts of Liberia to investigate their attitude towards the mission was essential. In order to meet this aspect, a trip to Gbarnga in Bong County was undertaken and interviews with Bong Peace Committee, and Bong Women for Development in addition to local individuals were executed. This excursion will to some degree increase internal validity, although more trips to more isolated areas would have increased it further (for an elaboration, please see section 3.6.3).

3.4.2 Construct validity and operationalization of terms

Case studies are often valued for their ability to provide detailed, holistic and contextual sensitive information about complex phenomena (Gerring, 2007, p. 49). The empirical analysis will often be ‘thicker’ in its consistency and volume than that of quantitative research designs. The reason for this depth in case studies is tied to the researcher’s objective of aiming at ensuring a high degree of construct validity by making sound operationalizations of the relevant theoretical concepts. Operationalization implies that you ‘speak the same language as your informants’ and that a concept is formulated in terms of measurable indicators (Gerring, 2007, p. 215).

The fieldtrip itself is an empirical example that illustrates the importance of operationalizing theoretical terms and hence securing construct validity as it proved surprisingly difficult to discuss the topic of this thesis with ‘ordinary’ Liberians. It seemed they had not spent much time thinking of UN legitimacy and how “universal” standards relate to the Liberian context. Hence, on multiple occurrences, I experienced that interviewees misunderstood what I referred to by using the term legitimacy. Often their associations would take them in the direction of legality and they would express that they did not think that the UN’s presence was at odds with International Law or the Liberian constitution. In that sense, it appeared that interviewees only had vague associations to the topic. This experience added extra pressure in terms of optimizing the operationalization of academic and theoretical concepts and making the topic more comprehensible to interviewees who are not well bewandered in academia in order to increase construct validity.

3.4.3 External validity

As mentioned above, case studies have originally been regarded as limited in its ability to generalize, but lately scholars have pointed to the potential of case studies in producing generalizable knowledge by serving as a detailed examination of a phenomenon on the basis of which it is

possible to develop or test historical explanations that may be generalizable to other events (George & Bennett, 2005, p. 5). Along the same lines, an *extended case study* “applies a reflexive science to ethnography in order to extract the general from the unique, to move from the ‘micro’ to the ‘macro,’ and to connect the present to the past in anticipation of the future, all by building on preexisting theory” (Burawoy, 1998, p. 5). This reflexivity according to Michael Burawoy means that by seeking not confirmations but refutations or anomalies the scientist can be inspired to elaborate an existing theory (Burawoy, 1998, p. 16).

Thus, while this study may not be a suitable method of producing statistical generalizations, it offers in-depth knowledge about processes unfolding at a given time and place. Not only is this requisite to make sense of the case in question; it can also offer fruitful terrain for analytical generalization and generating hypothesis and theories.

Accordingly, it may be possible to extract broader tendencies from the case of peacebuilding in Liberia and apply it to other cases with similar attributes (for an elaboration, see section 6.2). At the same time however, it is important to keep in mind that Liberia is only a single case in a population including several other peacebuilding missions, and consequently it is difficult to say anything with confidence about the overall population without studying other cases. The aim of this thesis is in that sense not to formulate statements encompassing all liberal interventions, but rather to contribute to the understanding of how factors such as universalism and liberalization relate to the local context of a specific host-country – namely Liberia. In that regard, based on empirical findings in-depth analysis are very capable of adding new information to the existing literature on peacebuilding. As John Gerring points out, “much of what we know about the empirical world has been generated through case studies” (Gerring, 2007, p. 20). The complex nuances provided by case studies offer insight that is little accessible when applying quantitative approaches in terms of establishing what processes and mechanisms that are at work in the country (George & Bennett, 2005, pp. 19-22). Generalizations from case studies are necessarily tentative in nature, and they should also be as clearly defined and delimited as possible. Yet it is precisely through the co-existence of case studies and broader statistical studies that social science research frontiers advance.

3.5 Reliability

Reliability refers to the extent to which the data collected and information you are given can be trusted. In order to increase the reliability of any given source (both documents and interviewees)

it is critical to assess who wrote it, who is being interviewed, what determines the purpose of the information given, is the information credible and of relevance? (Kjeldstadli, 1992, pp. 161-162). Keeping in mind that all authors and informants have an intention behind choosing the content of the information given underlines the importance of keeping a critical distance in order to reach sound conclusions¹⁰.

In this context it is also relevant to note that qualitative research on the basis of ethnography contains what Clifford Geertz in *The Interpretation of Culture* labelled as “thick descriptions” (Geertz, 1973). Thick descriptions refer to the notion that the author is applying an interpretative approach, meaning that phenomena are not only described but also interpreted. In this regard, it is important to keep in mind that the author’s prejudice and preconceptions will influence the interpretation of the phenomenon sought described. Consequently, it is crucial to problematize and evaluate the influence the author’s positioning has on the text.

One way of measuring reliability is to replicate a study and assess the degree to which the replication yields the same results. For practical reasons, replicating a study is however not always possible. Hence, another way of increasing replicability is to provide the reader with as much detail as possible about the research methods (George & Bennett, 2005, p. 106). In that way the reader is enabled to interpret the presented results in light of the methods applied and evaluate to what extent these findings are a product of choices pertaining to the formulation of the research design (Eliassen, 2014, p. 37). This chapter presenting methodological choices and challenges, in addition to the attached interview guide and available transcriptions of interviews are aimed at making the findings of this thesis as reliable and replicable as possible.

3.6 Methodological challenges

As Cato Wadel points out, qualitative methods are characterized by a certain flexibility, which can be described as a ‘circular dance’, as he puts it, between theory, methods and data (Wadel, 1991). This means that the scientist is capable of altering and adjusting his strategy for gathering data simultaneously to analyzing the data. Qualitative methods in this sense is a cyclic model as opposed

¹⁰ The interview with Nathaniel from the Peacebuilding Office (PBO) who blatantly stated that the PBO are driving the peacebuilding efforts more than the UN. In this case it may be useful to keep in mind *who* is talking. While this might be his genuine experience, it is also important to keep in mind that he is a representative of an agency that also wants to present itself in a certain way. As Thagaard points out, the descriptions informants provide can be a product of how they want to represent themselves (Thagaard, 1998, p. 105).

to the more linear model characterizing quantitative methods in which the gathering of data usually is terminated before the analysis is initiated. As will be shown below, this circular dance between theory, methods, and data was highly characteristic for this fieldwork, as adapting to methodological challenges was a constant undertaking. As mentioned above, one of the methodological challenges experienced when in field was associated with the difficulty of operationalizing theoretical concepts and making them meaningful for informants. However, a few other methodological trials experienced additionally deserve attention.

3.6.1 Research question

Originally, the purpose of the thesis was to investigate the perception of UN legitimacy seen from the perspective of the Liberian population. The intention was to focus on their experiences and opinions and to what extent *they* identify with the norms and institutions supported by the UN. Hence, before actually undertaking the fieldtrip, I expected that the majority of interviewees would be ‘ordinary’ Liberians. As strange as it may sound however, I ended up eventually having better access to academics, government representatives, NGO workers and UN peacebuilders. Almost half of the interviewees were International UN personnel, and the majority of the Liberians interviewed were either well-educated or had a respected societal status. I do not mean to say they well-educated people are not ‘ordinary’ but in Liberia approximately half of the population is illiterate and approximately 80% are unemployed, so in that sense being well-educated is distinct to a relatively small privileged portion of the population. Consequently, the sum of data gathered when in field appeared inadequate in terms of shining light on the perceptions of legitimacy of “ordinary” Liberians, which led me to change the research question so that more general perceptions of legitimacy could be included.

3.6.2 Accessibility to informants

I found that getting access to informants – both international and local was surprisingly difficult. Naïve as it may sound, I was under the impression that I could simply ‘show up’ at UNMIL Headquarters, and ask a nice person in the reception whom he/she could advise me to talk to and set up interviews. It turns out however, that they will not even let you get through security and into the building without having a contact on the inside. As I was not as such associated with an NGO or such, I had a very limited network through which to get this kind of contacts in the beginning.

In terms of getting access to ‘ordinary’ Liberians, it may seem puzzling that getting access proved challenging, considering that the country after all is full of Liberians. A variety of factors nevertheless hampered accessibility: Firstly, the global network of NGOs, as James Ferguson writes, might span the globe, but it does not cover it, it is linked to territories, but it does not flow through them. Hence, expat communities become a highly selective, spatially encapsulated, and self-sustainable entity in which expats can live without really interacting with the population of their host country. (Ferguson, 2006, p. 14). This goes for Liberia as well. There exists a significant segregation between the expat community and the local population in Monrovia. The structural set-up of the city is characterized by the existence of gated and guarded oases of expatriate residential compounds that are “surrounded” by the rest of the city and the local population. Expats would shop in Lebanese owned supermarkets too expensive for most Liberians to shop, when going out for a drink, it would be at bars where the vast majority of customers were expats and so forth. In other words, the lack of Liberian middleclass means that there are few – if any, shared avenues where expats and locals can meet on equal premises. After only two days, I was invited to stay in a spare room in an apartment in one of these compounds, which meant that I ended up directly in the so-called ‘expat bubble’, which it proved surprisingly difficult to break out of.¹¹

International residents can of course socialize with local employees at their work place, but for me, who was not associated with an organization, I had no such local colleagues. The division between expats and locals meant that in Monrovia where I spent most of my time, I struggled intensely to find fora where socializing and making friends with Liberians came naturally. I could have gone to the slums, but it seems like an awkward attempt of forcing a friendship. I did find one avenue, however, where I could socialize with locals on equal terms – the surfing environment in Robertsport. Robertsport is located in Western Liberia close to the border to Sierra Leone and being an enthusiastic surfer surprisingly gave me access to this small community. I spent five out of ten weekends in Robertsport, and although I did not conduct any formal interviews with these local surfers, through socializing and having casual conversations, background information constituting a basis for this thesis was gathered.

¹¹ The division of expats and locals was especially clear the first two weeks where I stayed at Mega Compound at the very end of Randall Street. Inside the compound there was a swimming pool surrounded by grand apartments. Literally right outside the gate however, was the slum. Children were doing their homework right by the gate in the light coming from the compound. There were no street lights, no houses, only tiny shacks of metal and stone. Quite a few people live there. The big metal gate into the compound almost became a symbol of the separation between the affluent expat community and the Monrovia locals. It felt odd entering and exiting the gate, it felt like leaving one world and entering another.

With regards to legitimacy, the detachment of the expat community from the local environment makes you wonder how the expats ensure that their activities reflect the desires of their host country, when there are hardly any platforms where interaction comes natural. Hence, even though I initially thought I would be spending most of my time during the fieldtrip with Liberians in order to investigate their perceptions of UN legitimacy, spending most of my time in the expat bubble surprisingly was an “eye-opener” too with regards to legitimacy.

Secondly, I completely underestimated the language barrier. English is the official language of Liberia, but Liberian English is quite distinct from British or American usage to put it mildly. Struggling to communicate with Liberians who were not used to ‘refining’ or moderating their local dialect without an interpreter made it difficult to pick up conversations with people on the streets or in shops, which was the most likely places to converse with strangers.

Thirdly, looking back, I should have made more of an effort to get out of Monrovia to interview people in rural villages. Interviewing people in the bush would have increased internal validity and representativeness of the study. However, not being associated with an NGO meant that I had little contacts to make use of and felt inadequately familiar with the environment to establish the extent to which I would be safe venturing into rural areas by myself.

3.7 Problematization of “the locals” and the West

Despite my discomfort associated with this practice, there are two words that are being utilized extensively in this thesis: the *locals* and the *West* or *Western* (e.g. *Western* concepts of a state).

In terms of using the term ‘the locals’ I do recognize that the Liberian population is not a homogenous group, and I acknowledge that there are huge discrepancies in opinions and perceptions along lines of ethnic, religious, socio-economic, political, and geographical affiliation. People’s opinions are shaped by their experiences, which can never fully be the same. Whether you are talking to someone from central or rural Liberia, or a representative from the political elite or someone living in West Point¹² will undoubtedly influence a person’s point of view. Hence, generalizing and applying the same categorical status to the citizens of an entire country may appear bizarre. The reason for doing so however, is neither to neglect nor disregard this internal diversity. Rather the aim is to use the term as an analytical concept formulated with the purpose of forcefully pointing out the danger of not having the voice of the average citizen in post-conflict societies to

¹² The biggest slum in Monrovia

serve as the basis on which peace operations are designed, as opposed to the voice of *external* forces. In other words, this analytical concept concerns not only the population of Liberia, but also every other host-country where a peacebuilding operation is launched.

Similarly, I recognize the problematic, yet regular, use of the term ‘the West’ in general parlance, and acknowledge that referring to the West as a singular ‘place’ or ‘entity’ considering the range of empirical differences is dubious. The term will however also serve as an analytical tool in this thesis to describe certain mindsets that share various features such as being heavily influenced by Christianity, traditions of the renaissance, protestant reformation, age of enlightenment and fundamental political ideologies including that of liberal democracy, rule of law, human rights and gender equality.

3.8 Conclusion

Peacebuilding has been analysed extensively *theoretically*, but insufficient attention has been devoted to looking into the dynamics and interplay between newly introduced norms and institutions and already existing local structures, values and traditions. It is within this realm that anthropological and ethnographic methods can truly excel. Being based in the country gives a unique opportunity to assess the actual on-the-ground attitude towards UNMIL. Talking, to not only people working with UNMIL, but also to people affected by the mission gives insight into the challenge of making sense of the enormous changes that are associated with a war to peace transition as well as hosting the one of the biggest international interventions ever to have been launched. Although putting the liberal peacebuilding under scrutiny theoretically is of great priority, qualitative methods have the added virtue of facilitating the development of *applicable* peace research. Thus, they also enhance the chances of building legitimate and sustainable peace.

4 Background for peacebuilding in Liberia



Figure 1. Map of Liberia. Source: United Nations (United Nations, 2007)

This chapter provides background information on the historic circumstances that eventually led to the launch of UNMIL in 2003. Contextualizing the mission within the historical Liberian framework will facilitate an understanding of the current situation in Liberia today and the following analysis in this thesis¹³.

4.1 Liberia: A country for freed American slaves

Liberia was founded by the American Colonization Society, which had the objective of establishing a 'haven' for 'free people of color': descendants of Africans who by luck, birth, or their own efforts were no longer legally enslaved (Moran, 2006, p. 2). In 1822, the first settlers from America arrived

¹³ The background information here is only a brief overview. For more on Liberia see (Boås & Dunn, 2013; Boås & Jennings, 2005; Boås & Stig, 2010; Chaudhary, 2012; Egnell, 2009; Egnell & Haldén, 2013; Ellis, 1999; Harris, 2012; Herman & Martin-Ortega, 2011; Jennings, 2014; Moran, 2006; Neumann & Schia, 2012; Schia & Karlsrud, 2013; Sriram, 2013).

and gradually the freed American slaves, later called Americo-Liberians, colonized the country. They formed a new ethnic ruling class, convinced of its superior civilization and intensely proud of its Christian heritage, American-style institutions of government, and a culture which set them apart from the native 'country people' or 'tribal people' (Ellis, 1999, p. 41). This created a divided society of 'civilized' rulers and 'native' dependants constituted by sixteen tribal/ethnic groups.¹⁴ In 1847, the African American settlers declared their independence from the American Colonization Society, and the Americo-Liberian-dominated True Whig Party governed Liberia as a one-party state for all but six years between 1870 and 1980.

4.2 The two civil wars: 1989-1996 & 1999-2003

In 1971 when President William Tubman died in office after having ruled for 27 years, William Tolbert succeeded him. Tolbert's regime was equally corrupt, but due to both pressures for change influenced by 1960s and 1970s student radicalism, and lack of resources available to maintain the system, it became obvious that the True Whig Party's hegemony was becoming increasingly insecure. Riots broke out in 1979 and on the night of 12 April 1980, Master Sergeant Samuel Doe undertook a coup d'état. Doe's regime turned out to be no less repressive than that of his predecessors (Bøås & Stig, 2010, p. 287).

This laid the foundation for the second civil war, which started in 1989, when the Americo-Liberian Charles Taylor's rebel force, the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) started a prolonged conflict with the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) and the United Liberation Movement for Democracy in Liberia (ULIMO). On 9 September 1990, Samuel Doe was overthrown and killed in a coup by Prince Johnson in collaboration with Charles Taylor.

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) established a peacekeeping mission in 1990, namely the ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG), and sponsored a peace agreement. However, fighting continued and the UN Security Council deployed the UN Observer Mission to Liberia (UNOMIL) in 1993. In 1995, the Abuja Accords were signed and elections were subsequently held in 1997 despite the continuation of violence. Charles Taylor won the elections by 75 per cent of the vote. Within two years, Taylor was confronted by another armed faction and spent his five year-term as president attempting to curb "rebels" who occupied more than half of

¹⁴ The terms "civilized" and "natives" were introduced by the Americo-Liberians in order to distinguish between the settlers and the indigenous population. They still occur in government documents of today, such as the Rules and Regulations of the Hinterland (Neumann & Schia, 2012, p. 23).

the country (Moran, 2006, p. 5). During Charles Taylor's presidency, public infrastructure, security, and rule of law collapsed, causing opposition to grow. In 1999, Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) joined the fighting against the AFL, now led by Taylor. Both sides were accused of extensive human rights violations against civilians, as well as recruitment of child soldiers (Herman & Martin-Ortega, 2011, p. 143). It is estimated that the two civil wars killed 270.000 Liberians, and over one third of the country's inhabitants had been internally displaced or became refugees (Neumann & Schia, 2012, p. 23).

4.3 The Comprehensive Peace Agreement

In August 2003, Taylor accepted an ECOWAS-brokered Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) and went into exile in Nigeria. The CPA ended two successive civil wars, and followed fourteen failed peace agreements. The UN mission in Liberia (UNMIL) was deployed in 2003 as a multidimensional peacekeeping mission with 15.000 peacekeepers and civilian personnel (Neumann & Schia, 2012, p. 23). The CPA also provided for a National Transitional Government of Liberia (NTGL). Elections held in 2005, which were generally considered free and fair, resulted in the appointment of Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf. The two civil wars destroyed the economy, left whole generations without education, and left behind no functioning institutions, and a culture of corruption and mistrust in public authorities (Herman & Martin-Ortega, 2011, pp. 142-143).

With this historical backdrop in mind, I will now delve deeper into the findings and analysis of this thesis with the aim of answering the research question posed in Chapter 1.

5 Findings and analysis

Ok, but there is also an interface where tradition meets the modern state, and I think if we learn to understand how this interface works and how that interrelationship works, I think a lot of the tensions will reduce, and also that the UN would have to learn just like development partners to deal with some of these hybrid forms of governance, yeah.

(Kwesi, Ghanaian academic. Accra. Interview July 10, 2014).

The purpose of this chapter is to answer the research question presented in the introductory chapter: *How does the UN's approach to peacebuilding relate to the Liberian context? And what factors are important in establishing UN legitimacy?*

This chapter answers this research question firstly by showing that contrary to the scrutiny the UN has been subject to criticism for utilizing a 'one-size-fits-all' recipe for implementing peace in Liberia, this criticism of the UN is only partly valid. In Liberia, a customary informal system exists parallel to that of the statutory formal state system. Considering the above criticism, one would expect that the UN would attempt to eradicate these customary authorities and institutions in order to substitute them with institutions resembling those of the West. What I found however was not that the UN is trying to 'overrun' the customary system in Liberia. In fact, UN employees expressed appreciation for the customary system, inter alia because it takes pressure off the formal system by being present in rural areas where the formal system is little accessible. In terms of legitimacy, what this tells us, is that while the UN perhaps does have a narrow template or fixed 'Rules of Engagement' to follow (thereby undermining normative legitimacy), when deployed, the organization may show more pragmatic flexibility (whereby increasing sociological legitimacy).

Secondly, it will be shown that the UN's universal human rights component at times 'clash' with some Liberians' normative attitude towards some issues such as clitoridectomy, and the rights of LGBTi peoples and children's rights. It will be illustrated how this interplay manifests itself in various ways. While human rights can be used as a tool of empowerment for those whose rights are being violated, it can also cause local resistance towards what is being perceived as Western imposition of norms – especially if these norms are seen as infringing on values that people regard as being defining features of their identity. The findings also suggest that different methodologies of the UN affect the extent to which its objectives are being perceived as imposed.

With regards to what factors that are important in establishing UN legitimacy, the empirical findings indicate that legitimacy to a higher degree is tied to priorities, than what the critical scholars

have acknowledged so far. After fourteen years of civil war, it appears that the local population is more concerned with security and having basic needs covered, than with the UN's principles being in line with those of Liberians'. Similarly, when discussing imposition of UN principles as delegitimizing peacebuilding, the findings indicate that important nuances should be considered: The UN, does apply a staunch approach to practices categorized as being 'harmful traditional practices', while showing more willingness to accommodate other non-harmful particularistic practices, such as customary conflict resolution mechanisms.

These topics will dictate the structure of this chapter.

5.1 UN applying a one-size-fits-all model in Liberia?

I think we need to be humble enough to say "look the traditional Weberian state might not necessarily be what is useful for other parts of the world". OK?

(Kwesi, Ghanaian academic. Accra. Interview July 10, 2014).

Liberia, as with many other West African countries has a dual legal system: a statutory law system based on the American legal system parallel to that of a customary law system. The statutory system in Liberia is comprised by the Supreme Court, one circuit court per county, magistrates' court, and justices of peace courts as typical of an American-inspired system. With regards to the customary justice mechanisms, the Hinterland Regulations place judicial competences in rural areas in the hands of the local chiefs and establishes the structure of the traditional court system. The chiefs are mandated with judicial authority by administering customary courts and applying customary law. They are under the competence of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, as opposed to the Ministry of Justice, and hence they are not part of the national court system. The chiefs are locally elected and have jurisdiction over matters such as marriage, including adultery, child and spousal maintenance, debt and petty theft. According to the Hinterland Regulations, customary courts are, in ascending order in terms of appellate jurisdiction: the Town Chief, the Clan Chief Court and the Paramount Chief.

Disputes are also resolved through customary community practices of dispute resolution and justice. These types of mechanisms are usually administered by the elders in the community or by the *zoes* who head secret societies¹⁵ and are considered to be custodians of traditions and customs.

¹⁵ Secret societies are centuries old societies into which women and men are initiated. Poro is the name for the men's society, and Sande is the name of the equivalent society for women. They perform a variety of societal functions, and are believed to have magical and spiritual powers (for more information, see section 5.4.1).

(Herman & Martin-Ortega, 2011, p. 146). The dual system was consolidated in the 1943 Rules and Regulations Governing the Hinterland of Liberia and recognized by the 1984 Liberian Constitution (Herman & Martin-Ortega, 2011, pp. 143-144). This means that Liberia has never existed as a prototypical democratic Weberian Western state, but is characterized by so-called *hybrid* forms of governance.

With regards to the criticism directed towards the UN on grounds of applying a standardized Western one-size-fits-all model, this criticism appears only to be partly valid. It might be true that the UN exerts a certain influence on the content of peace agreements and that this includes ‘suggesting’ to war-torn countries that they should initiate processes of political, social and economic liberalization. However, on the basis of the empirical data gathered during the fieldtrip to Liberia, it seemed that in this case the UN is not attempting to defeat the customary system in Liberia. Due to the complementarity between the statutory and customary system in Liberia, UN employees recognize the legitimacy of the customary system, its role in maintaining peace in the communities and its function in terms of executing tasks that the statutory system is incapable of carrying out.

This argument will be presented firstly by accounting for the legitimacy of the customary system. Secondly, it will be shown how the UN does follow a strict peacebuilding recipe consisted of political, economic and social liberalization, but that in practice UNMIL shows flexibility by recognizing the importance of the customary system. Thirdly, the argument that the UN is more culture-sensitive than what has been acknowledged by critical scholars will be presented by looking into the peacebuilding component of Civil Affairs, which has been designed with the purpose of contextualizing peacebuilding.

5.2 The legitimacy of the customary system

The farther one travel into the rural areas of Liberia, the more one will experience that the traditional authorities are the authorities that people adhere to as opposed to the statutory ones (Thomas, Liberian academic. Accra. Interview July 11, 2014). Also at the national level, the traditional system is not something that is wise to neglect. As one informant highlighted: *‘I’ll tell you something: no one will win an election in Ghana or Liberia if this person said “I don’t respect chiefs or I don’t respect elders of women’s groups, no!”* When discussing whether it is possible to overrun local structures, he stated that: *“No, you can’t. They (the UN) will be driven out of town. I mean if they tried to ride over these structures they are the ones who will get very badly hit”* (Kwesi, Ghanaian academic. Accra. Interview July

10, 2014). In that sense, disregarding the statutory system is, according to this informant, equivalent to political suicide.

As it appears from the citation below, at times the customary system enjoys much more legitimacy than that of its statutory counterpart:

(...) what the state has done all throughout was to incorporate and to consolidate its authority, but those institutions have been very resilient and the reason why they have been resilient is that they are embedded in local cultures, you understand? Even us, an educated person, if I was the Minister of Defense and I went to my village, (...) and the Sande or the Poro came to town yeah? My Defense Ministry position doesn't play right there, you understand? It doesn't play right there, it ceases! People will respect it, but by the rule of engagement I'm there because I belong to a particular generation of people and me and they can order me to do certain things and that is one of the reasons why I think some of the things they do work. It's not that everything they do is good, no don't get that, I'm not being romantic about it, but if I steal this pen in Monrovia you take me to the justice or peace court, I can swear on an oath that I didn't steal it, take me to my village, I steal this pen, and then we will go to the shrine and then you ask me to swear to the shrine and then I didn't do it. If I stole it, I would tell you I stole it. Because in my mind I will know that if I lied before the shrine I'm cursed for the rest of my life, my entire generation of people, so it's just to tell you how they work sometime and the way we get results by using those institutions (...)

(Thomas. Liberian academic. Accra Interview July 11, 2014)

There are several reasons for why the customary system enjoys such a high status and why people prefer to settle issues by way of using this system as opposed to the statutory system.

5.2.1 Decentralization

Firstly, as James Ferguson puts it: “Africa has in recent years seen a proliferation of collapsed states or states whose presence barely extends beyond the boundaries of their capital cities” (Ferguson, 2006, p. 13). This goes for Liberia as well. The government is overly centralized at the national level in Monrovia, and poor infrastructure impedes communication between Monrovia and the counties. At times you hear phrases such as ‘the Republic of Monrovia’ or ‘The Republic of Bangui’ to describe how only very few government services exist outside of Monrovia (Keane, 2012, p. 87). Even after the war, police presence outside of Monrovia has been seriously limited (Sherif & Maina, 2013, pp. 1-2). Hence, as one informant noted:

There can be a difference between how the courts are perceived in Monrovia and in the bush. (...) There are more resources in Monrovia. It is hard to say if the judges are better or worse, but the resources are definitely centralized here. So, if you have less resources to the bush, you will have less trust. If there are more resources to public defenders here, in the bush they will have less resources for public defenders, so the level of strength will be perceived as less strong, so they will go to informal structures, community leaders.

(Roman, Rule of Law Officer, UNMIL. Monrovia. Interview December 6, 2013).

Similarly, another informant stated that: *“People have lived most of their lives in the bush, and even though there’s a central government in Monrovia, it has provided no services and often people associate it with worse than good. What survived the war was the old traditions”* (Nathan, Political Affairs Officer, UNMIL. Monrovia. Interview November 11, 2013).

In that sense, when people in rural Liberia has had either no experience, or mostly bad experiences with representatives from the statutory state system, it is not surprising that they turn to customary institutions that they identify with and perceive as being legitimate.

5.2.2 Corruption

Secondly, another aspect tied to many Liberians’ preference for the customary system is related to the prevalence of corruption in the statutory system. Endemic corruption is worsened by lack of resources. As an informant pointed out, the police uses corruption as means to survive, as their salary is simply too low to constitute a sufficient basis of income (Linnea, Peacebuilding Advisor, UNMIL. Monrovia. Interview December 3, 2013). Hence, the police will try to ensure an income by imposing excessive fees and fines on victims and perpetrators or by accepting bribes. Victims are often compelled to bribe police and judges simply to make them perform their jobs. At times, they have to pay for petrol so that the police can apprehend a suspect. The following quote serves to exemplify this notion: *“Justice is for sale, because police is not paid lots. So they (Liberians) trust the chiefs and traditional leaders more than they trust the formal system.”* (Nathaniel, Consultant, Liberia Peacebuilding Office (PBO). Monrovia. Interview October 23, 2013). Similarly, another informant stated that:

The local town chief is the one you trust, and you see, the police as the one you don’t trust. In some areas, the police are not trusted because of corrupt practices, and the way they execute their duties and functions, and the legal processes are seen as a longtime and costly practice. If you tell the chief,

he says tomorrow you come back and they give you a prompt redress right there. The presence of the state is still not extended to far off areas, so you don't have the legal, so the most accessible are the elders, the chiefs. So you go to them because you trust them. Some places you have both, but you prefer to go to the chiefs. One, because of it's rapid, and two, because they don't exploit you. The police charge for transport, signing a piece of paper etc. they don't trust them.

(Edward, Senior Peacebuilding Advisor, (PBO). Monrovia. Interview November 11, 2013)

An UNMIL employee voiced similar thoughts:

I think a lot of people have more trust in the local system, because they see that the local police is very corrupted. A lot of it has to do with trust. If you go to the town chief things might actually happen. It's more difficult to make things happen if you go to the police. If you go to the police the case might stop there. If you have a case you might have to pay the police to go to the crime scene, take the perpetrator to court, so you need to have the resources to proceed with the case in the formal system.

(Linnea, Peacebuilding Advisor, UNMIL. Monrovia. Interview December 3, 2013).

In this informant's opinion, as long as the corruption is so strong in the statutory structures, the strength of the customary system is not going to decrease any time soon.

Hence, although the UN is working with the government of Liberia and thus is supportive of the statutory system, seen from the perspective of many Liberians, it is unsurprising that they prefer to make use of the customary institutions as much as possible, when they associate the statutory with corruption. This underlines that applying a one-size fits all model to peace is not advantageous as long as there is no trust in the statutory system. Applying a one-size-fits-all approach may in fact undermine existing well-functioning institutions that already enjoy a high degree of internal legitimacy.

5.2.3 Reflection of norms

Thirdly, Liberians prefer to resort to the informal system as means to settling disputes because it to a higher degree reflects Liberian social norms. As the following shows, Liberians make strong normative distinctions between which matters that should be dealt with in public and which matters that should be dealt with domestically. In terms of domestic violence, for instance, as one informant explained: "*if I slap the wife and we went into confrontation, and she take me to court, if people judge*

openly, the people outside listening will laugh at it. Because it is things that need to be taken home. (David, NRC. Gbarnga. Interview December 10, 2013). Hence, not adhering to norms stating that domestic violence is something that should be handled privately, can bring about communal ridicule. Furthermore, as this same informant explained, for a man, being taken to court and hence making the matter public, means that the woman will have “*done him worse than ever*” and hence perhaps causing the marriage to break due to this public humiliation. Similarly, an UNMIL employee noted that: “*For example if a girl is raped, the family goes to the perpetrator they go ask for a pig or chicken and then the matter is closed. The matter is also very shameful so they don’t want to drag it to court.*” (Linnea, Peacebuilding Advisor, UNMIL. Monrovia. Interview December 3, 2013). Shame and fear of being subject to mockery by the community are in that sense important factors in determining whether to approach certain kinds of crimes by utilizing the statutory or customary justice mechanisms. Taking other cases, such as murder, to court is not associated with this kind of stigma.

5.2.4 Reconciliation and continuity of the community

A fourth reason for why Liberians value the customary system is that they perceive it as performing better than the statutory system in terms of securing the continuity of the community when dealing with law breakers. As Hezekiah from the Regional Justice and Security Hub explained:

(...) the informal is more like relationship building than enforcing law. The formal is more enforcing law than relationship building. (...) it is done in such a way that it reconciles, they see why it is wrong. But in the formal system, I may end up in jail, but in the informal system we can forgive and give me a second chance. (...) There are crimes were you go to jail, but domestic problem, if I beat my wife, sometime the local chief can handle it in such a way I can be disciplined, but if it is the police I will go to jail. At the community level it is done well. But it depends on the crime.

(Hezekiah, Manager. Gbarnga Regional Hub. Gbarnga. Interview December 12, 2013).

Similarly, a member from Bong Peace Committee stated that:

Police, you get punishment, in community you also get reconciliation. (...) You don’t want to put people in jail, because you need them in the community. Not just jail jail jail, we need peace. But some crimes, like rape or murder we don’t temper. Or killing, but domestic issues and somebody fight, you say sorry. Let bargain be bargain.

(Gbarnga. Interview December 10, 2013).

In the same way, another informant noted that:

(...) if someone rapes a child and they live in same quarters they will say don't carry that man to the police because if you carry him they will take him to judge and he will put him in jail for life time. Sometime they fear if they live in the same quarters, the local family will be against you if you put their child in jail. We all live in the quarters, the family say if you do it again you can go in jail for a life time.

(Susannah, Gbarnga. Interview December 12, 2013).

Correspondingly, when discussing the many billboards along the main roads in Liberia stating that: "Rape is not a family matter – Report it!" Vacus, a Liberian employee of the Norwegian Refugee Council explained that: *"If my nephew rape my daughter and I report it and he is sent to jail for 15 years it will split the family. My brother, his father will be angry with me for locking up his son"* (Vacus, NRC. Gbarnga. Interview December 13, 2013).

As these examples illustrate, the way in which crimes are dealt with in the statutory system are perceived as creating *"more hard feeling than the informal"* (member of Bong Peace Committee. Gbarnga. Interview December 10, 2013). The customary is perceived as a process of reconciliation, as opposed to simply enforcing the law. Based on the quotations above, notice as well the emphasis that these Liberians put on the well-being of the family and the community as opposed to the individual. Fear of animosity between families and within communities seem to weigh heavier than the desires of the individual victims. It seems however, that this is slowly changing. There are forces pushing to make rape and domestic violence something that should be dealt with in the statutory system, (as illustrated by the billboards), but as shown, many still regard these issues as private. Accordingly, it was also pointed out that:

Domestic violence is a big problem, because the women has no exit out, they can't complain to the police, A) because it would have an impact on their life, the man gives financially support and B) you may face repercussions from the community. A woman alone would be more vulnerable. And there is a perception that the community will tell her "why didn't you deal with the problem at the community level or in the family instead of taking it to the police?" It is ambiguous, because protection and violence is by the same person.

(Joao, Human Rights Officer, UNMIL. Monrovia. Interview December 6, 2013).

Hence, causing the imprisonment of a husband on grounds of domestic violence will leave the family very vulnerable. The woman subjected to domestic violence faces a difficult dilemma in which taking her husband to court paradoxically can leave both herself and the rest of the family in an insecure situation lacking both a security provider and the husband's income (David, NRC. Gbarnga. Interview December 10, 2013). This dependence on the community and the family furthermore illustrates the infeasibility of trying to shove a one-size-fits-all model down the throat of recipient countries, without taking into account the culture, society and norms. It illustrates the importance of having a system that does not leave the individual worse off if applying its services, than if not, and shows how the customary system in Liberia has in a way been designed to meet the realities on the ground.

In general thus, there are advantages and disadvantages to both the statutory and the customary system. The customary is not binding, whereas the statutory is. The statutory however is characterized by corruption, which the customary is not. A downside to the customary system is that international principles such as due process and fair trials are broken every time this system is applied (Linnea, Peacebuilding Advisor, UNMIL. Monrovia. Interview December 3, 2013), but on the contrary, the customary does perform better in reflecting Liberian norms. Selecting one system over the other furthermore varies according to geographical location and whether one is placed centrally or rurally. As one informant pointed out, in Monrovia, one would always go to the police, whereas in rural areas, one would go to the town chief (Adolphus, biology student. Monrovia. Interview October 14, 2013). Furthermore, in rural areas, whom you go to depends on the crime. As shown, some things are considered to be family matters, whereas some crimes - depending of the gravity, is beyond the jurisdiction of the chief. What this tells us is that there is a relatively clear division of labour between the two systems (although perhaps not perfect¹⁶), they complement each other, and they enjoy legitimacy, although for different reasons. The customary system appears to enjoy a higher degree of sociological legitimacy than the statutory, while the statutory enjoys more normative legitimacy in the eyes of the international community, as it (in theory, and apart from the corruption, and lack of resources etc.) meets international standards in terms of securing principles such as due process and fair trials. Having pointed out some of the merits of this hybrid form of governance empirically illustrates the infeasibility of applying a non-flexible

¹⁶ One informant for instance, mentioned that it had been a problem that bodies were dealt with in rural areas by summoning a jury of the fifteen oldest people from the nearest village, who would then: "come out and walk around the body for 10 laps, talk about it for 10 minutes and then decides whether it's a crime or not". (Patric, Corrections, UNMIL. Interview December 4, 2013). As he pointed out, be engaging with a potential murder case in this fashion, the crime scene is being destroyed.

formula to peacebuilding, the question remains however, is the UN (as postulated by the hyper-critical school of thought) trying to overrun the customary system in Liberia?

5.3 Is the UN trying to get rid of the customary system?

As accounted for in the theory chapter, the UN has been subject to criticisms tied to applying a one-size-fits-all recipe for implementing peace involving transferring Western prototypes of social, political and economic organization to post-conflict societies without taking into consideration the existing institutional framework on the ground. On the basis of this, one would assume that the logic consequence is that the UN is trying to eliminate customary authorities and systems, and replace them with models resembling those of the West.

On the one hand side, this tendency was affirmed by a self-critical UN employee, who stated that:

We (the UN) are setting the initiative. We tell the government: "do this strategy". Of course it should be them (local actors) to set the priority, but it's our template, or format, where they fill in the empty spaces. (...) Sometimes in New York the missions have become somewhat of an industry, so you just roll over and maybe they make some changes, but for the human rights it's pretty generic. We've been here 10 years shouldn't the mandate be revised? You are going into 10 years, and can identify some of the main HR concerns, so maybe the mandate we could fit it more to the existing concerns. (...) With any institution, you have to do some re-thinking, you've got to make changes. I feel that the UN missions, the model they are using really hasn't changed that much over the last 20 years, they are probably just adding.

(Joseph, Human Rights Advisor, UNMIL. Monrovia. Interview November 13, 2013).

Similarly, another informant indicated that liberalization to some degree is enforced. In his own sarcastic phrasing, he stated that:

(...) economic liberalization is not always the best for us. (...) so when they tell us to liberalize, basically they say "look we came to liberate you so please let's flood your market with goods and services" and that's why I think this the liberal peace concept that underlies a lot of the peace agreements, I think we need to look at it again, 30 years after we started implementing it.

(Kwesi, Ghanaian academic. Accra. Interview July 10, 2014).

On the other hand side however, informants also stated that: *“everything I have seen has been attempts to reconcile the two systems”* (Joao, Human Rights Officer, UNMIL. Monrovia. Interview December 6, 2013). On several occasions, informants both from the UN, but also Liberians pointed out that there is a need for the informal system as means to *“filling the gaps”* or *“lessen the pressure of the formal system”* (Hezekiah, Manager, Gbarnga Regional Hub. Gbarnga. Interview December 9, 2013). As noted above, lack of decentralization of government structures means that the customary system plays an important role in areas where statutory services are non-existent. As an informant from UNMIL put it:

I don't think they (the UN) are trying to get rid of the informal system, but to reconcile the two. Communities become very isolated during the rainy season for example. They need some way of dealing with problems in isolated areas. It just have to become clear what are the rules, and bringing up to date the interaction between the two. (...) Some are making the case that we are going slowly towards an only formal system. I don't think necessarily that's the right way to go. The important thing is that communities stick together in peace, and you can reach that through reconciling the two. You can make an argument for only one (system), but will it work in this context? I don't think so. The informal structures are doing a great job where rule of law doesn't exist, so the chiefs are doing a great job in keeping the communities together. Liberia should strengthen that, but not in serious cases. For instance, petty theft you can use the informal, but serious crimes like murders, rapes you don't want someone in Maryland to pay a small fine and some else they are going in jail for life. But, we are not formal spokesmen for the UN. I'm not sure what the official UNMIL stand is.

(Joao, Human Rights Officer, UNMIL. Monrovia. Interview December 6, 2013).

Similarly, an informant accounted for a situation in which some Liberians had wanted to administer sassywood¹⁷, or ‘trial by ordeal’, but had been blocked by a chief (Joseph Gillespie, Human Rights Advisor, UNMIL. Monrovia. Interview November 13, 2013). The chief in this case thus played the role of actually preventing people from carrying out a traditional practice on the grounds of it being against rule of law. In that sense: *“The chiefs have the power to make sure that even traditions against rules are not executed. That's why we need to keep chiefs”* (Joao, Human Rights Officer, UNMIL. Monrovia. Interview December 6, 2013).

¹⁷ Sassywood is a traditional form of justice in which someone is accused of a crime and then forced to take poison. If the suspect survives the poison, it is an indicator of innocence, whereas if the person dies, it is a sign of guilt.

As these quotes indicate, these UNMIL employees expressed appreciation and acknowledgement of the role of the customary system. Statements like the above formulated by UN personnel can of course be criticized for being biased, but also Liberians voiced that except from some clashes like the UN's stand on corporal punishment as means of disciplining children in childrearing, the UN would take its point of departure in the traditional Liberian approach (Member from the Bong Peace Committee. Gbarnga. Interview December 10, 2013).

Another argument opposing that the UN is utilizing a one-size-fits-all model in Liberia is provided by Niels Nagelhus Schia and John Karlsrud who found that several components and activities in the UN apparatus are in fact designed specifically for the purpose of adapting peacebuilding to local needs. The Civil Affairs section of the UN most notably, has the purpose of adapting peacebuilding initiatives to the local conditions by facilitating the implementation of peacekeeping mandates at the subnational level. Furthermore, the UN's Department for Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) provided an overview of nationalities of almost 1000 UN Civil Affairs Officers deployed in field and found that the largest proportion of these came from Africa. Additionally, by 2012 the number of national staff employed by Civil Affairs in different UN missions was close to parallel to that of the international staff. UN components like these that are present at the subnational level and are designed to engage with local actors in order to ensure contextualisation and local anchoring of the peacebuilding processes are underrepresented in the literature. Instead, there is a tendency to cluster 'peacebuilders' in a singular homogenous category, without acknowledging the variety of actors and mandates that exist (Schia & Karlsrud, 2013, pp. 234-236).

In sum, as illustrated above, some informants affirmed that the UN is applying a template that has seen little change the last twenty- thirty years, while others voiced that in their experience they had only seen attempts at reconciling the customary and statutory system. Both observations are equally valid. It is likely that the UN does have a non-flexible formula in the sense that their peacebuilding missions are founded on the objective of wanting post-conflict countries to liberalize politically, socially and economically, but as the above shows, in practice, when deployed, they adapt to the circumstances. Having a one-size-fits-all template for peacebuilding and adapting to local circumstances are not mutually exclusive. The first concerns the aim of UN peacebuilding, whereas the latter concerns the means. The UN recognizes the legitimacy of the customary system and acknowledges the complementarity of the two systems. Looking into the Civil Affairs section of the UN furthermore shows that non-Westerners are approximately as represented as Westerners

and that cutting peacebuilders across the board can be seriously misleading. This speaks in favour of the sociological legitimacy of the means of UN peacebuilding.

By drawing attention to this kind of nuances, this thesis constitutes an attempt at challenging the current tendencies in the academic literature of UN peacebuilding of presenting legitimacy in black and white, and hence adds complexity to the issue.

Next, it will be shown how human rights constitute an interface where dynamics between the existing particularistic norms and values of Liberia and the universal human rights as formulated by the UN materializes.

5.4 Human rights

When we went to the counties we spoke to traditional leaders, and they often felt that we were imposing international values on them. What usually happens if someone is trying to impose something, what you do is you take the opposite approach, even if you don't think the international rules and norms are wrong. It's more that you feel that your identity is threatened, so you refuse to acknowledge them.

(Linnea, Peacebuilding Advisor, UNMIL. Mornovia. Interview December 3, 2013).

As accounted for earlier, human rights play a key role in peacebuilding operations. In the case of Liberia this is expressed through Chapter VII of the UN Charter, Security Council Resolution 1509 (2003), which authorizes UNMIL to: “contribute towards international efforts to protect and promote human rights in Liberia” and “to ensure an adequate human rights presence, capacity and expertise within UNMIL to carry out human rights promotion, protection, and monitoring activities” (United Nations, 2003, p. 4).

Human rights in particular make up an arena where the interrelationship between particularistic norms and values of Liberia and the universal human rights as formulated by the UN unfolds. The following sections will account for some of the most contentious human rights that informants raised as examples of UN norms clashing with Liberian culture and context. It will be shown how friction between the objectives of the UN and that of the Liberian population is expressed, and it will be shown how ways in which Liberians engage with these inconsistencies vary. While the concept of UN human rights in some instances can serve as a tool of empowerment, in other cases this same concept may produce local resistance in response to what is regarded as Western imposition of values.

5.4.1 Sande bush schools and clitoridectomy

Centuries old, very powerful, secret societies into which women and men are initiated exist in Liberia. Poro is the name for the men's society, and Sande is the name of the equivalent society for women. They perform a variety of societal functions, and are believed to have magical and spiritual powers. Both of these societies have long initiation periods, traditionally 4 and 3 years in which initiates are “educated”, prepared for adulthood, and socialized according to prevailing cultural norms during seclusion in the “bush schools” (Keesing & Strathern, 1998, p. 266).

In terms of the Sande society, every year thousands of girls leave their homes to attend the forest camps aimed at preparing them for marriage. They are taught everything from social etiquette, good morals, domestic skills, cooking, plaiting baskets, and correct sexual comportment, to how to look after their future home and husband. However, part of going to the bush schools also involves clitoridectomy (popularly referred to as female genital mutilation (FGM)). National data suggests that two thirds of girls and women have been subject to this practice in Liberia, where clitoridectomy is common in thirteen out of the sixteen tribes (Batha, 2014).

With regards to the UN, several Liberian informants pointed to this as being a particularly sensitive and delicate issue that exemplifies cultural Liberian traditions that are at odds with the norms of the UN.¹⁸ As one informant put it: *“It is very controversial. It is still taking place, but it is against the UN Human rights, and it has been suggested prohibited by law.”* (Adolphus, biology student. Monrovia. Interview October 14, 2013).

On the one side, clitoridectomy is described by one Liberian as: “the traumatic and painful rituals that (...) cost some girls their lives” (Azango, 2012). The girls- some as young as 2 years of age- are largely unaware of the fact that these rituals will be taking place in the bush schools, and furthermore they are ignorant of some of the potential complications of clitoridectomy. Clitoridectomy can block the birth canal leading to complicated births and, at times, the death of mother or baby (Azango, 2012). On the other hand side, as one informant put it: *“the UN teach us it is not good, but some people they say it is in their culture, they can do it, it’s their culture. Mostly they say it is their school, they carry them there for teaching”* (Susannah, Gbarnga. Interview December 11, 2013). Hence, there are other fractions of the Liberian society that praise the practice as an old and proud

¹⁸ The Universal Declaration for Human Rights “recognizes the rights of all to security of the person (Article 3), and the right to freedom from inhuman, cruel, or degrading treatment (Article 5). Both of these articles are applicable to clitoridectomy.

cultural tradition: “It is in their culture” and so “they can do it”. A representative from the Liberian Peacebuilding Office also expressed this internal tension when informing that:

Female Lawyer Association Liberia is run dominantly by people with not traditional background. They are well off, educated etc. They are trying to abolish FGM, but they don't understand what it means in traditional settings, what values it has. They said there should be an abolition of that practice, but it went against the culture of the traditionalists. They said you can't do this. There was serious tension.

(Edward, Senior Peacebuilding Advisor, PBO. Monrovia. Interview November 11, 2013).

Despite the official shutdown of the schools by traditional leaders and government representatives in March 2012, the practice continues to occur and the police is doing little to address its occurrences. As a Human Rights Advisor working for UNMIL, said in an interview: “*The police are like “it's tradition”. If something is linked to secret societies, they are very apprehensive. You have cases where girls are abducted by the secret society, and they themselves (the police) or family members can be members of the secret society*” (Joseph, Human Rights Advisor, UNMIL. Monrovia. Interview November 13, 2013). In that sense, as the police is not as such actively engaging with it, it signals that the practice is still somewhat unofficially sociologically legitimate. Even though human rights are national or international legal rights, existence in law alone will not ensure us that they are powerful and compelling. In other words, even though the schools were officially abolished in 2012, it does not follow that people will have stopped supporting them from one day to the other.

5.4.2 Friction: Tool of empowerment

Having established that clitoridectomy is seen (by some) as a legitimate customary practice, even though it does not fit in neatly with the UN human rights framework, leads us back to the discussion of the validity of universalism. What are the consequences of disproving universal validity in this way? Is the logic consequence that efforts trying to introduce them should be halted? I think not.

The reasoning behind stating this, is that when engaging with the concept of universalism, it is worthwhile putting an emphasis on the normative character of the concept. In the words of Anna Tsing: “it is important to see generalization to the universal as aspirations, an always unfinished achievement, rather than the confirmation of a pre-formed law” (Tsing, 2005, p. 7). Hence, although universality is not valid in terms of succeeding in accommodating all of the differing

preferences across cultures empirically, it does not preclude that it cannot be perceived as a legitimate tool of empowerment, or that human rights are not *desired*. As Beth Simmons points out: “nobody cares more about human rights than the citizens potentially empowered by these treaties. No external-or even transnational-actor has as much incentive to hold a government to its commitments as do important groups of its own citizens” (Simmons, 2009, p. 154).

The point here is that although the concept of human rights can be criticized for being embedded in a Western historical and cultural context, it is important at the same time to be careful to strike a fine balance between protecting cultural diversity and not ‘romanticizing’ and protecting everything that is “traditional” *just* because it is tradition. This is especially important if there are strong domestic forces working to distance themselves from these practices. Hence, as conceptualized by Tsing it is important to keep in mind that cultures are dynamic and that even though some practices and traditions are cultural customs, it does not naturally infer that they are appreciated. Hence, even though clitoridectomy is considered to be an important part of Liberian tradition, and even though it *used to be* ‘valued’ or ‘compulsory’, it does not follow that this perception is static and rigid.

To sum up, there are two important aspects to draw from this. The first is that while it is true that the UN is opposing the implementation of clitoridectomy despite the practice being valued by *some* blocs, it must be emphasized that the UN is not the only force opposing this practice. Hence, when discussing the degree to which the UN is *imposing* human rights, and the extent to which this affects UN legitimacy, it is important to take into consideration that there are *internal* actors pushing for the same rights as the UN and simultaneously trying to rid Liberia of the practice of clitoridectomy. Secondly, for these people, referring to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is a way to back up their cause with international legitimacy and credibility. As an UNMIL employee pointed to: “*You have a lot of very good local human rights activist working for gender equality, women activists, they see UN as something that can help them drive their case. Both in terms of funding, capacity training and knowledge*” (Linnea, Peacebuilding Advisor, UNMIL. Monrovia. Interview December 3, 2013). In this sense, the UN provides them with a tool of empowerment that is acknowledged internationally and gives them a device with which they can *claim* rights they have been deprived so far.

While this is one way of engaging with and utilizing human rights that do not per se cohere with the particular case of Liberia, as will be shown below, the concept can also be made use of – not to *change* existing norms – but to *solidify* them.

5.4.3 Rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex peoples

Other human rights supported by the UN that are somewhat conflicting with the prevailing mind-set of Liberians is that of the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans/transgender and intersex peoples (LGBTi). Homosexuality, “*even in Monrovia*” as a Liberian informant put it, “*It’s a no go area*” (Thomas, Liberian academic. Accra. Interview July 11, 2014).

In an interview with Bong Peace Committee anti-gay sentiments were expressed as follows:

It’s not human rights, the constitution of this land prohibits homosexuality. We have not revived to say that it can be practiced here, it is prohibited. Some big hands wanted to bring it forward, but the people oppose it. It is happening, but underground, not officially. Two weeks ago I was talking to a councilor Augusto, and he made us understand in that session, that our law, the law of this land, is saying no see such practice here. Anyone who do that practice here are wrong.

(Gbarnga. Interview December 10, 2013)

As the quotes above indicate, homophobia in general is widespread in Liberia.

Life for homosexuals in Liberia is particularly difficult for two reasons: Firstly, the country has anti-LGBTi laws making same-sex conduct punishable by up to one year in prison. Even though these laws are rarely enforced, Liberia in February 2012 sought to pass new laws that would target LGBTi people with much tougher sentences. One bill would amend the penal code to extend the criminal penalty for same-sex practices to a felony punishable by up to five years’ imprisonment; The second bill – drafted by the ex-wife of the former president Charles Taylor, Senator Jewel Howard Taylor – would make gay marriage a crime punishable by up to 10 years in jail. Jewel Howard Taylor inter alia stated that: “[Homosexuality] is a criminal offence. It is un-African.” (Guardian, 19 March, 2012).

Even though the UN’s national counterpart, President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf has publicly announced that she will not sign any new anti-LGBT legislation, she has however defended existing anti-homosexuality laws on the grounds of respect for ‘traditional values’. As she told the British Guardian newspaper in March 2012: “We like ourselves just the way we are” and “We’ve got certain traditional values in our society that we would like to preserve” (Guardian, 19 March, 2012).

Secondly, not only is homophobia legitimized by way of having anti-LGBTi laws enshrined in the country’s constitution, LGBTi persons in Liberia may also face serious repercussions from their communities. According to members of the LGBT community, the pending legislation has already

exacerbated discrimination, harassment, and stigmatization (Human Rights Watch, 2013, p. 4). The anecdote below captures this:

There's a story of a guy who goes into the FM station and decided that he would speak for gay rights. You see the FM station, he and another guy are in the FM station. The guy is against and he is for. And then people began to call and then outside they realized that a crowd had built up. Now for the crowd out there, anybody coming out of that station they would have assumed that it is the guy who was for, so what the other guy did was that the person who was against the gay rights he then began to describe himself, what shirt he's wearing and this and that, you understand. Saying "look at the end of this program I see a crowd building up, but I'm wearing this shirt and I'm not the one who's talking, so what that tells you (...) he knows what was awaiting him.

(Thomas. Liberian academic. Accra. Interview July 11, 2014).

As with the case of clitoridectomy in the Sande bush schools, human rights can be utilized by the LGBTi community as tool of empowerment and provide international legitimacy and credibility to their cause. However, friction between the local and the international as manifested by the UN, can spark not only processes of *adapting*, but also processes of *rejection*.

5.4.4 Friction: Rejection

While human rights rhetoric can serve to back up the quest of abolishing clitoridectomy or ensuring the rights of LGBTi peoples, the same human rights agenda can serve to solidify, entrench, and deepen existing attitudes *against* the LGBTi community or anti-clitoridectomy forces. For instance, anti-gay movements have been explained as being propelled by anti-Western sentiments and pro-gay support is seen as a Western influence (McConnell, 2014; Sneed & Welsh, 2014).

The perception that homosexuality is typically Western was exemplified in a discussion with a Ghanaian academic, who indicated that perhaps the reason for why the rights of LGBTi people have gained the prominent status of being enshrined in the UN human rights is related to the commonness of LGBTi people within the elite of the UN determining the norms-agenda. As he put it:

I think you have to ask yourself another question. Who are those who define the UN norms, ok, certainly to become global norms? (...) I think it's a power play. Who are those who sits in those councils and decide that: "Hm, homosexuality is not a bad thing at all" and maybe if you ask yourself what is the culture of homosexuality within the UN?- It's very rampant in New York,

extremely rampant within the Secretariat. The powerful men, you know if you want to get another P4step¹⁹ sometimes, I mean within the UN, people talk about it. OK? (...) So you know, I think we need to understand the politics around norms development, within the UN itself that then becomes global norms, because the question that you ask is very important: "How come the UN norms seem to contradict the norms of quite a number of the member states?"

(Kwesi. Ghanaian academic. Accra. Interview July 10, 2014).

This quote once again tells us something about legitimacy. As he put it: "*How come the UN norms seem to contradict the norms of quite a number of the member states?*" In his perspective, the reason for why rights of LGBTi people have attained recognition as human rights has to do with homosexuality being rampant within the elite of the UN, rather than being a norm that is representative for UN member states in general. Hence, entities within the UN influencing the to-be universal norms, *are* in his perspective dictating the norms-agenda that is to be implemented globally.

To spell it out, *friction* between the local and the global can materialize in the shape of local resistance emerging in response to Western intervention and imposition (Kilcullen, 2009, p. 41). Friction is expressed when for instance politicians utilize rhetoric referring to Western influences and framing them as neo-colonialist attempts of infringing upon the territorial integrity of African countries to his or hers own political advantage. Friction, in this sense, serves to solidify existing normative viewpoints when politicized.

5.4.5 The importance of identity

Another equally important aspect to draw from this rejection of the UN principle of LGBTi rights is that it appears very much to be tied to cultural/national/continental identity. As mentioned above, Jewel Howard Taylor for instance explained the dismissal of the rights of LGBTi people on the basis of it being 'un-African' or 'un-Liberian'. Similarly, President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf stated that "We like ourselves just the way we are" and "We've got certain traditional values in our society that we would like to preserve" (Guardian, 19 March, 2012). Additionally, an UNMIL employee explained how, with regards to homosexuality, "*lots gets tied into tradition. People will say that: "Gay rights is not our tradition"*" (Roman, Rule of Law Officer, UNMIL. Monrovia. Interview December 6, 2013). This kind of statements makes you wonder whether opposition to UN human rights is particularly likely to emerge, when these human rights are perceived as infringing upon values and norms that

¹⁹ P4 is an example of a particular stage at a promotional career ladder.

people regard as being fundamental elements of their respective ethnic, national or continental identity. As another UNMIL employee explained when discussing local counterparts' attitude to homosexuality:

When you had discussions with local counterparts, it was very very far from the values the UN is trying to uphold. People that I spoke to felt that it was a cultural thing, it's a cultural wrong, that it's not part of Liberian culture and should continue to be that. Sodomy is a crime in the Liberian criminal code (...). Liberia is not unique when it comes to this. This goes for the African continent. When we went to the counties we spoke to traditional leaders, and they often felt that we were imposing international values on them. What usually happens if someone is trying to impose something, what you do is you take the opposite approach, even if you don't think the international rules and norms are wrong. It's more that you feel that your identity is threatened, so you refuse to acknowledge them.

(Linnea, Peacebuilding Advisor, UNMIL. Monrovia. Interview December 3, 2013).

As this quote exemplifies, the crux of the matter might not even be that you are in staunch opposition to the UN principle in question, but rather that you feel that these principles are being forced upon you and that you need to 'step up' to defend your identity. Basically, holding on tight to this kind of values seems to express a close and sensitive link between norms and identity. Unsurprisingly, people will fight hard to maintain and protect something they see as being the very foundation of their very *self* and avoid being stripped of the fabric that they see themselves as being made up of. This "*fear of culture being taken away*" (Roman, Rule of Law Officer, UNMIL. Monrovia. Interview December 6, 2013) fosters counter-reactions based on a desire for self-preservation. Friction between 'international' and 'local' norms in this regard, can be understood as producing resilience of identities.

5.4.6 Children's rights

Children's rights, child labor, and corporal punishment of children are also very sensitive and controversial issues that illustrate the tension between UN human rights and particularistic socio-cultural expectations to children and practices of childrearing in Liberia. As a Human Rights Advisor from UNMIL explained: "*You find people saying: 'human rights goes against our culture. Human rights are spoiling the children of Liberia'. I was in one of the counties, two fathers walked up to me and said: 'you're human rights, you're spoiling our children.' This issue is raised all the time.*" (Joseph, Human Rights Advisor, UNMIL. Monrovia. Interview November 13, 2013). A Liberian employee from the

Peacebuilding Office (PBO) exemplified this perception of the UN further, when accounting for an episode in which he was very ill perceived by a community because he was advocating children's rights:

I was a consultant in UN on children's rights. I went to the elders and chiefs and I explained my mission: "I have come to discuss the issue of children's rights and how they are violated". The chief told me to "get out, you are brainwashed by the UN, you are one of them who causes troubles. You are doing more harm than good" and they drove me out of the town. These are practices that have been so built into the lives and norms of people, if you want to abolish that it's a long time process, that is simply what I am sayin'.

(Edward Senior Peacebuilding Advisor, PBO. Monrovia. Interview November 11, 2013)

In short, as the above quotes shows, the children's rights component of human rights is seen as contradicting Liberian culture, and the UN is perceived as "brainwashing" people and causing "more harm than good".

When examining statements from the fieldwork that engage with the issue of children's rights, it appears that there are a few reasons in particular that drives the frustration and aversion towards the UN in this regard. One has to do with the UN not taking into consideration the lived experience of some people who struggle to cover basic needs without the assistance of children. In terms of corporal punishment, Liberians that were encountered during fieldwork disregarded the advice of the UN purposely because they were afraid of 'ruining' their kids, should they fail to discipline them sufficiently. The latter aspect is centered around the 'community responsibility' of the child.

5.4.7 Necessity of children's assistance

One driving force of aversion against the UN's advocacy of children's rights seems to be connected to Liberians feeling that the UN is failing to understand and consider that the assistance of children in executing chores is a necessary precondition for the domestic logistics to add up. As accounted for earlier in the methods chapter, this perspective was especially expressed in an encountering with a woman from Bong Women for Development in Gbarnga (see section 3.3.1). This woman openly voiced her frustration with the UN for having told her not to use her children for labor, while she had no other option as the workload was too heavy for one person to carry solitarily and that covering all areas of domestic tasks were simply impossible without the help of the children (Bong Women for Development. Gbarnga. Interview 10.12.2014).

5.4.8 Corporal punishment of children

Corporal punishment continues to be a common method of childrearing in Liberia, in fact, I witnessed a woman whipping a toddler with a long slim stick on the street one day in Monrovia. When discussing this issue with a Liberian woman, she told me that:

The UN will tell you that you don't have to beat the children (...). For me, I don't take everything (they say). If you don't discipline, sometimes you beat, sometimes I beat them, they say child right child right, if you don't beat the children, you don't discipline them, something can go wrong. So sometime you beat them to say "this you did is wrong, I don't want you to do it". They won't respect you. (...). If you beat them, you tell: "I don't beat you because I don't love you but the thing you are doing. I advise you, you don't listen, now I beat you because I want you to change." (...). I beat on the hands, on the palm, because it won't hurt them, but not the ear or the face. But some parent kick them on the ear and beat them, even kick them, you don't do that. You beat the child with love. I beat them on the palm, but in a few minutes I call them back and pet them and tell them I don't beat them because you don't love them.

(Susannah. Gbarnga. Interview December 11, 2013).

Thus, as in the case with this woman, she was aware of the UN's stand on the issue, but chose not to act in line with it, because, as she said: "if you don't discipline them, something can go wrong" and "they won't respect you". In other words, she feared getting unruly or disrespectful kids, should she fail to discipline them properly. In her perspective this was an act of love ("You beat the child with love", as she put it).

As mentioned above, cultures are dynamic. This example shows us that this informant was well-aware of the existence of children's rights, but chose to 'weigh' them against what she believed to be effective methods of childrearing. In that sense, she has been exposed to the "international" viewpoint as formulated by the UN on how to and how not to discipline children, but chose to stick with her own methodology. This woman, is an example of how local people are neither helpless victims, nor tabula rasa, or blank slates of paper upon which to write down international human rights standards. On the contrary, they are active in negotiating, considering, modifying and engaging with the outside world.

5.4.9 Communal responsibility

In European societies, the *self* is described as being indivisible (in fact that is the very meaning of the term *individual*). In many non-Western societies however, the self is regarded as being the sum of the social relations the individual is engaged with (Eriksen, 1998, p. 67). Culture plays an important role in identity formation. Our cultural upbringing influences the very way we regard concepts such as ‘self’ and ‘identity’. Having grown up in an individualistic culture often entails assuming that people are autonomous individuals with clear boundaries separating them from others. In collectivistic cultures, however, the concept of the ‘self’ is often based more strongly on the connectedness between people. Hence asking: “who am I?” is more likely to be answered in ways that reflect a person’s relationships with family members, friends and others (Passer, 2009, p. 587). In that sense, many African countries are for instance characterized by putting greater emphasis on the welfare of the community than what has commonly been described as being typical of Western societies, which to a higher degree focus on the welfare of the individual. On the basis of the statements in some of the interviews with Liberians, it appears that the frustration with the UN’s perspective of child labor is also tied to Liberians perceiving the UN as not taking into consideration this *communal* interests when conducting advocacy for this kind of rights. As one Liberian put it:

(...) the further you go into the rural areas where at least I have done some work, what the folks are saying is there's human rights for the kids but there is no what you call human responsibility or something for the kids. They will always tell you "the UN say we have this right and we have that right, but where is the responsibility of the child – the community responsibility?" There is no sense of community responsibility, and for them that is a contradiction, because when you reach a particular age in a village, when you are going from here to the road to fetch water, that path that you have to travel or your mother has to travel or your farther has to travel to go to the farm or to go and fetch water, that path needs to be clean from time to time. In most cases, the people who do it are kids who are at the age of fourteen, thirteen, fifteen. In most cases they gave them that task to do. You call the kids today, they will tell you no, you are abusing my rights for telling me to go and do that. So what they are asking is: "Where are the community responsibility?" (...) Today if you told any kid to go and do this he will say "A a, you are abusing my human rights". And for them, they can't comprehend this human rights business.

(Thomas, Liberian academic. Accra. Interview July 11, 2014).

Along similar lines, another Liberian informant pointed to the responsibility of the child in terms of maintaining and catering for the family, and meeting certain socio-cultural expectations in the sense of “playing the role they are supposed to play”:

We have a unique culture. We have unique norms. In our culture if you participate in the home, you feel part of that family. Girls will fetch water, boys will get wood and we see that as a way of contributing to up keeping the family. But the human right say this is child labor, so traditional dwellers they see that the kids are not to play the role they are supposed to play. They see human rights advocacy as taking the responsibility off the child. (...). You contribute to uphold the family but now it is human rights abuse.

(Hezekiah, Gbarnga Regional Hub. Gbarnga. Interview December 9, 2013).

As Eriksen describes, in some societies a person is not viewed as being *complete* before having acquired basic skills expected by the local culture. Status as a person is in other words something gradually attained starting at birth and increasing in the same pace as the person is learning the society’s norms and knowledge (Eriksen, 1998, p. 67). Perspectives on clitoridectomy, homosexuality, and children’s rights in Liberia correspondingly appear to be an expression of identity-related issues. Being a Liberian child involves meeting certain communal expectations, executing certain chores, and having a responsibility towards the community. Hence, exempting a Liberian child from the very practices that *makes* a Liberian child is, in the eyes of many, *nonsensical*.

5.5 Summary of findings so far

As the above examples illustrate, there is a variety of practices and attitudes in Liberia that are somewhat inconsistent with the human rights agenda of the UN. How this friction between the objectives of the UN and that of the Liberian population is expressed, and ways in which Liberians engage with these inconsistencies vary. While the concept of UN human rights in some instances can serve as a tool of empowerment, in other cases this same concept may produce *societal antibodies* in response to what is regarded as Western imposition of values. Counter-sentiments towards the scheme of the UN may consequently be particularly likely to arise, when these are perceived as ‘attacking’ or ‘threatening’ norms that people associate with, or regard as being fundamental features of their identity. For many Liberians, being circumcised is a crucial part of being initiated in the Sande society, and for many Liberians, being homosexual does not cohere with being Liberian. Similarly, being a Liberian child entails having certain communal responsibilities. When

stripping a society of the features they perceive themselves as being made up of, it is not unlikely that this process will end up creating resistance, hence, rather than altering their identities, this type of dynamic may enforce and make them more resilient.

Having now established some of the ways Liberians relate to UN norms sought implemented, that do not cohere with the Liberian context, the next question is how does the UN engage with these? Or, to pose the question more radically: To what extent is the UN *imposing* its objectives?

5.6 Imposition

Imposition, as mentioned in the theory chapter (see sections 2.4, 2.7.3, and 2.8), has been identified as one of the main factors undermining UN legitimacy.

When discussing this topic with informants, perceptions regarding the extent to which the UN applies imposing methodologies in its approach to human rights in peacebuilding operations varied widely. Two informants did not judge the UN as pushing forward human rights. On the contrary the organization was seen as ‘keeping a low profile’ on contentious issues as the ones mentioned above (Thomas. Liberian academic. Interview July 11, 2014). As one of these put it:

Female mutilation and secret societies are delicate subjects. Many things they don’t correspond to UN values, but UN would not lead in trying to stop that. It’s ancient and not only Liberia, but if Liberians try to deal with the harmful practices, the UN would maybe support it if they were contacted. They would work with government, so if it was a priority of government they would maybe support it.

(Nathaniel, Consultant, PBO. Monrovia. Interview October 23, 2013).

Similarly, another informant stated that: “*They (the UN) are only playing their role, but not dominating*” (Member of Bong Peace Committee. Gbarnga. Interview December 10, 2013).

Thus, as these citations show, the perception of these informants were that the UN would not drive or force through anti-clitoridectomy measures despite its formal stand on the topic. Rather, the UN would leave it to the government to set the agenda, and should the government choose fighting the practice of clitoridectomy as a key priority, the UN would back it up, but without dominating or hijacking the process.

When asking UN staff themselves about their approach however, the methodology was regarded as being more explicitly active. With regards to clitoridectomy for instance, as several informants pointed out, the UN differentiates between harmful and non-harmful traditional practices of which clitoridectomy is considered to be a harmful traditional practice. As an UNMIL Human Rights Advisor described:

(...) human rights is also about protecting culture, but you can have practices that are harmful and human rights concerns and others that aren't. So the approach has been by the UN that the harmful practices, the ones that violate international human rights standards need to be addressed.

(Joseph, Human Rights Advisor, UNMIL. Monrovia. Interview November 13, 2013).

Similarly, another informant stated that:

There should be no compromise on human rights. There will be a clash, but we should conform to minimal international standards. We should work towards transforming Poro and Sande institutions. The decisions to join Poro or Sande is by parents, not the children.

(Edward, Senior Peacebuilding Advisor, PBO. Monrovia. Interview November 11, 2013).

In an interview with another UN Human Rights Officer, I told him that when discussing the extent to which the UN is imposing values on post-conflict recipients of UN peacebuilding missions I was getting diverging and outright contrasting replies; some would say that the UN definitively are imposing values, while others would oppose this strongly and say that they definitely do not. I was puzzled by this contradictory black-and-white representation of the issue. This human rights officer's reply however offered a more dynamic and nuanced account:

I would say both. They impose- on certain things definitely, and others no. In Fish Town I had this huge problems with human rights. The perception of human rights there is strangely very bad. You are a human being that say: "I don't have human rights". Here they reject it. In a place like this you would feel that they would value strengthening their rights, but they don't because they don't understand it. I used to have a human rights program on radio every week, and I would try to explain why human rights are to the people, and try to explain that it's not a Western idea. I was trying to explain that is not something that an American or French white person decided "okay let's impose this on the rest of the world", it's a group of people thinking what do all of us, white, black, male, female, gay, handicapped, what makes all of us, what is common to all of us and this is what they found. The idea behind human rights is that we are all born free and equal

and that's it. This is not something own. You are born with a nose, hand and eyes, same goes for rights. You were born with them and no one can take them from you.

I asked him why people in River Gee reject human rights, why was there such an aversion? His reply indicated that this was tied to imposition by the UN. In his words:

It has to do with our predecessors who said: "this is what you have to do". Perhaps it was our mistake as human rights activists in our approach, our aggressive approach to IMPOSE instead of opening eyes to some things that was already there. The people would come to me and say "oh you human rights people, first of all who is that human rights person?" -they thought human rights was the name of somebody. "Since you people came, or since the human rights, we have no more power on our children, women. Our children are spoiled, they will refuse to do anything, we cannot beat them anymore". They feel we have taken away power from them. It's an approach where we put everybody on the same level of equality. Women and children are equal to men. Teachers can't beat their students, so it makes it difficult for them to control their classes. So human rights shouldn't start telling them off. And it's easy to do so, sometimes you are outraged by what you see, instead of taking a step back and asking why are you doing it? It's the only system they know.

(Joao, Human Rights Officer, UNMIL. Monrovia. Interview December 6, 2013).

There are a few important aspects to draw from these citations. Firstly, contrary to both the hyper-critical school of thought that is presenting liberal peacebuilding missions as characterized solely by imposition, but also contrary to the liberal strand that is presenting peacebuilding missions as pure altruism, the picture is not black and white. It is not a question of "yes, the UN is imposing values" or, "no, they are not". Rather, it appears that on *some* issues, the UN is unwilling to compromise (*harmful* traditional practices), and on other issues, like allowing for customary conflict resolution mechanisms to exist, the UN is accommodative, and does not seek to force a one-size-fits-all model upon Liberia.

Investigating this more thoroughly and identifying exactly which components of the mission or norms of the UN that are perceived as being imposed is vital in order for the UN to tailor its missions to the local context. Mapping out this kind of contentious issues and the dynamics feeding aversions against the UN will furthermore allow the mission to show more methodological sensitivity and design approaches for each particular issue that works both for the organization and for the population in question. In general, it should be emphasized that it is not human rights *as a package* that is ill-perceived, but some components of human rights (Hezekiah, Gbarnga Regional

Hub. Gbarnga. Interview December 9, 2013). In that sense, the purpose of this argument is not to state that Liberians are condemning human rights in totality, but merely to draw attention to some of the more contentious issues and show how these are engaged with. Secondly, as the human rights officer pointed out, the reason for why people in Liberia have a certain aversion against human rights is both, as he said, that people feel that their power is being seized, but also that human rights activists have applied an “*aggressive approach to IMPOSE instead of opening eyes to some things that was already there.*” (Joao, Human Rights Officer, UNMIL. Monrovia. Interview December 12, 2013). This brings us to another of the major findings of the fieldwork in Liberia, namely that the methodology of the UN plays a crucial role in determining the degree to which the UN is perceived as imposing norms upon the Liberian population.

5.7 UN in Liberia: The importance of methodology

Here am I, big American cowboy, coming to civilize a bunch of Africans”. Now, when you have somebody like that representing the United Nations, even if they do good things about water, hygiene, and sanitation, people will not buy into it.

(Kwesi. Ghanaian academic. Accra. Interview July 10, 2014)

One thing that became clear over the course of the fieldwork was that the extent to which human rights are perceived as being a Western concept sought ‘imposed’ on the Liberian population by the UN is highly dependent on the *methodology* by which these rights are sought introduced.

As it was brought to my attention by an UNMIL employee, for UN personnel to decrease the imposing factor, referring to national rules rather than international rules (that so happens to be the same) might make it easier for the local “audience” to relate to. Sharing his experience, he stated that:

(...) in Fish Town I would use national rules rather than United Nation Declaration on Human Rights. I would look to what is the equivalent in Liberia. Because it decreases the foreigners’ impositioning factor. I would point to Liberian rules or it is even better if it is in the constitution. You can say: “look, we are not telling you what to do, this is your own law”

(Joao, Human Rights Officer, UNMIL. Monrovia. Interview December 6, 2013).

As shown by the following, other ways by which the UN can decrease and are decreasing the perceived imposing factor were identified by various informants. Inter alia, it was mentioned that

the UN should show more humility and listen more to its national counterparts. Stepping back and letting the host country execute tasks under the supervision of the UN, as opposed to executing the task itself would furthermore increase local ownership and decrease dependency. Finally, applying an educational rather than an imposing approach appears to be much more well-perceived and an effective way to move forward.

5.7.1 Be humble...and listen

The UN, according to one informant, should be *“humble...and listen”*. In his opinion, UN officials *“will come into town and, more often than not, they come as an alternative authority”* with the attitude that they *“know what you need”*. As he pointed out: *“Maybe they don't put it that brutally but there's a certain unwillingness to listen and engage”* (Kwesi. Ghanaian academic. Accra. Interview July 10. 2014). His point was that, if the UN enters a country while signaling that it is the *“new viceroy”* or *“governor of this collapsed state”*, as he put it, people will not welcome or show openness to the whatever initiatives the UN is wanting to implement. He furthermore narrated that when you go to Liberia, people will tell you about the Secretary General's representatives who were *“true Americans”* with an attitude saying that: *“Here am I, big American cowboy, coming to civilize a bunch of Africans”*. The result, he argued, of having someone like that representing the UN is that people will not buy into the values of the UN, even if the UN is responsible for other accomplishments such as providing water, increasing hygiene and sanitation (Kwesi. Ghanaian academic. Accra. Interview July 10, 2014).

Similarly, as the human rights officer from UNMIL noted: *“human rights shouldn't start telling them off. And it's easy to do so, sometimes you are outraged by what you see, instead of taking a step back and asking why are you doing it? It's the only system they know”* (Joao, Human Rights Officer, UNMIL. Interview December 6, 2014). Hence, despite the frustration experienced as a human rights expert over the human rights violations encountered, pointing fingers and condemning the local population might not be the best way to go about it, as it might foster a defense reaction as opposed to openness and willingness engage in dialogue.

A better way for the UN to go about it, would, in the perspective of one informant, be to allow people to talk, consult them, make suggestions, and then discuss these suggestions with the people potentially affected by them. Eventually, he argued, they would begin to accept the suggestions, but noted that this is a long process. The problem as it is now, he stated, is that the UN will enter the country and say: *“We have five years”* (Kwesi. Ghanaian academic. Accra. Interview July 10, 2014). When someone has lived a certain kind of life for sixty years, however, it is difficult to change this

life-style in five years. Telling people that what they have done or believed in for sixty years, and which has served them well, should simply be thrown away, is likely to be ill-perceived. Hence, as he pointed out, the methodology is extremely important. He summed up this discussion by voicing that:

I think particularly in post-conflict settings, I mean, the UN must really make an effort to engage and to listen a little bit more. Because if you look at what it does and the monies (money) that are used, I truly think that a little bit more open engagement, collaboration, talking will give them equally good results.

(Kwesi, Ghanaian academic. Accra. Interview July 10, 2014).

Other methodological recommendations of informants involved for the UN to mentor more, rather than leading, and advising as opposed to executing.

5.7.2 Mentoring rather than leading, and advising rather than executing

Informants pointed out that contemporary peacebuilding has a tendency to lead rather than assist, and execute rather than supervise the execution by local actors. Hijacking a peacebuilding process in this way, how involuntary this hijacking may be, impedes local ownership and fosters local dependency of the UN mission.

The UN in the sense that, according to an UNMIL employee, should become better at mentoring:

(...) you (the UN) are not really leading, but assisting, advising. Even if you see problems, you don't point fingers. It's more time consuming than workshops, but it's really home-grown at the grass roots. You allow mistakes, failure. You take the correcting actions, but you're assisting them making the corrections.

(Joseph, Human Rights Advisor, UNMIL. Monrovia. Interview November 13, 2013).

The upshot of failing to ensure local ownership in this regard is, as a UN employee noted that: “*It makes them (Liberian actors) assume that the UN should do things that they themselves have the capacity to do. So that's also a very fine balance. And that's where UN need to step back and be the advisors and guiders but not the doers.*” (Linnea, Peacebuilding Advisor, UNMIL. Monrovia. Interview December 3, 2013). A concrete example of this kind of dependency was expressed by an UNMIL human rights advisor, who accounted for a situation in which the Liberia National Police (LNP) refused to pick up a dead

body found in the streets of Monrovia. Apparently, the LNP was waiting for the UN Police (UNPOL) to pick it up. As this informant said:

The issue is you can be holding back the country. (...) a mission is needed for a period of time, but what are the drawbacks? Dependency. We are here to mentor, but they should take the initiative. I really think there should be a rethinking of UN peacekeeping and how to frame it. It needs to be more targeted, have more direction.

(Joseph, Human Rights Advisor, UNMIL. Monrovia. Interview November 13, 2013).

Another important methodological approach in this regard, he mentioned, was to create an environment that facilitates open dialogue and home-grown solutions, and which is characterized by trust and appreciation:

You need to develop good working relationships, and I am going to be judgemental to this organisation, arrogance is a dead end. If you are imposing, it's not home grown, you're thinking we know better, it's so important that they come to their own conclusions. Even if some of their opinions doesn't resonate with human rights. (...) Having a discussion on it, sometimes it's just sitting in a discussion, you can get more out of that than an official training. It's methodology, building mutual respect and understanding. It's not imposing, but reflecting. (...) For me this is real ownership, where they take responsibility.

(Joseph, Human Rights Advisor, UNMIL. Monrovia. Interview November 13, 2013).

Hence, open dialogues in a non-judgmental environment can facilitate processes that lead local actors to deduce conclusions themselves, as opposed to being told what the conclusions should be in the eyes of the UN. In this sense, the local population is not given the answers, but are allowed to reflect and identify solutions on their own.

Overall aspects to extract from these perspectives are that methodology not only affects the perception of the degree to which the UN is imposing values and norms, it also affects local ownership and dependency-related challenges.

5.7.3 Education

UNHCR worked to champion issues that violated women's rights. But before you can take these practical steps, first you need to create space for people to be educated. It takes time. You need trust and confidence. The traditionalists need to start trusting female associations and UN

(Edward, Senior Peacebuilding Advisor, PBO. Monrovia. Interview November 11, 2013).

Applying an educational approach might similarly reduce the perceptions of the work of the UN as being characterized by imposition. As one informant put it: “(...) *the way the old institutions work* (Sande and Poro bush schools) *inherently violates these norms, but by educating people they can make the connection themselves.*”(Edward, Senior Peacebuilding Advisor, PBO. Monrovia. Interview November 11, 2013). Hence, the perks of utilizing an educational approach is that in places where human rights is a new concept, or where there exists certain aversions towards it, or it outright contradicts core cultural norms, it is more likely to take root, if people come to understand *why* it makes sense. For instance, in terms of corporal punishment, mentioning to parents that hitting a child on the head when the brain is still developing can cause brain damage, might make more sense to them than telling them that it is wrong simply by virtue of violating human rights (Joseph, Human Rights Advisor, UNMIL. Monrovia. Interview November 13, 2013).

The same goes for the example of clitoridectomy in the Sande bush schools. Educating people on the health related dangers associated with the practice may resonate more with people than utilizing rhetoric pertaining to the human rights lingo. This was supported by an informant from Gbarnga, who said that: “*Take for example FGM, they (the UN) sensitize people to see the danger associated with it. In some places it is still in practice and people hold it in high esteem but by education it will fall away bit by bit*” (Hezekiah, Gbarnga Regional Hub. Gbarnga. Interview December 9, 2013). Correspondingly, as another informant stated:

If I went into a village now and told them "Look, what you people are doing (is wrong), I may never return to that village, because they still have not come to look at the health side (...) it's something that we have to educate them over a period of time, and (it) will not be that generation in the villages now, it will take time before. Yeah?

(Thomas. Liberian academic. Accra. Interview July 11, 2014).

Another example was provided by a human rights advisor who stated that:

(...) since it's a cultural tradition the way to address it is through sensitisation, awareness raising, health issues. It's a discriminatory act, women are being targeted. But the government does recognise that it is an issue. The way is not to outlaw it at this point in time, but to carry out awareness raising programmes.

(Joseph, Human Rights Advisor, UNMIL. Monrovia. Interview November 13, 2013).

In this sense, the UN recognizes that referring to abstract principles that are alien to some may not be the most efficient way to go about it. Finding a methodology that makes people *understand* and *agree* upon the norms implemented, may be much more efficient than ‘brainwashing’ (to put it unfairly bluntly) recipient populations. Applying educational approaches in other words, as an informant put it, means that: *“at the end of the day that’s the bottom line. It’s genuine, it’s theirs, they feel it in their hearts and mind, they really genuinely see why this is good for my family, community, country, they believe it, it’s not because they’ve been indoctrinated.”* (Joseph, Human Rights Advisor, UNMIL. Monrovia. Interview November 13, 2013). In this sense, educating people and reaching a state where they come to appreciate this knowledge will decrease the imposing factor that is associated with methods perceived as being characterized by imposition, or as this informant put it ‘indoctrination’.

5.8 Upshots in terms of legitimacy

If you take post-conflict country, most of them are happy that somebody is coming to help them anyway, so they will accept whatever you throw at them. But I don't think that that is the legitimacy that the UN wants. I think what the UN wants is a general legitimacy where people say: "This is our preferred partner". Right now, I don't think so.

(Kwesi, Ghanaian academic. Accra. Interview July 10, 2014).

Reading heavily loaded citations, stating that peacebuilding is a coercive instrument of global liberal governance, that generates new conflicts and dependency (Lidén, 2009, p. 631) can easily cause one to doubt the legitimacy of the peacebuilding endeavor. Similarly, reading that peacebuilding sustains “a particular world order of politics that privileges the rich and powerful states in their efforts to control or isolate unruly parts of the world” (Pugh, 2004, p. 39) does give associations to a practice that is in fact an extractive neo-imperial attempt at keeping the discontent global poor in check by deploying peacebuilding missions. As naïve as it may sound, this kind of readings had left this author with a clear expectation that local ownership issues, and not succeeding in contextualizing peacebuilding sufficiently by taking into account the local context and values, would cause people affected by the UN’s initiatives to perceive the UN as being extremely little legitimate. Conducting the very first interview in Liberia with a biology student however made this hypothesis fall apart instantly as it became clear that *values* may be deprioritized when you find yourself in a *desperate* situation.

5.8.1 Desperation and priorities

When discussing legitimacy it is, as mentioned earlier, important to keep in mind the distinction between legitimacy in the legal sense, and the sociological and normative legitimacy (Liden, 2005, p. 11). Legality-wise peacebuilding operations are unproblematic as peacebuilding missions are only launched when invited by the host country. Sociological legitimacy, however, is, as the following example shows, more debatable, as it refers more to whether there is evidence of consent by the people affected.

The presence of the UN, according to one informant, is: “legitimate in the sense that they are invited, but not in the sense of understanding the traditions and workings of the ordinary Liberians” (Adolphus, biology student. Monrovia. Interview October 14, 2013). A few minutes later, this same informant stated that the: “UN is perceived by most Liberians as a savior. At the time they came it was tough and they (people in Liberia) didn’t know what the future would have looked like, had the UN not come.” (Adolphus, biology student. Monrovia. Interview October 14, 2013).

Thus, on the one side, this informant acknowledges that the UN is lacking understanding of the traditions and workings of ordinary Liberians, but on the other hand side, the presence of the UN is clearly perceived as being highly legitimate and the UN is indeed regarded as “*a saviour*” coming to the rescue of Liberians. Initially, this discrepancy seemed rather paradoxical. However, as the following quote shows, fourteen years of civil war can forsake serious desperation in a country. Consequently, any kind of assistance at that stage is highly appreciated:

(...) Liberians were desperate when UNMIL arrived, so people care less about whether the UN is in line with Liberian values. What concerns you at that time is to have something to eat. (...) At the time, due to desperation they did not care about the content of the documents and treaties they signed, (...) When you are in desperation you don’t argue, because you want them to come. (...) Sure there were things in the treaty they would have liked to change, but what to do when you are desperate?

(Adolphus, biology student. Monrovia. Interview October 14, 2013)

What this tells us is that legitimacy to a high degree is tied to priorities: Covering basic needs in a desperate situation is much more urgent than securing coherence between the values and norms sought promoted by the UN and contrasting traditional local values. As the informant noted: “*What concerns you at that time is to have something to eat.*”

Similarly, it became clear that when discussing the legitimacy of the UN, UN as a security provider was something that people held in high esteem and which provided the UN with legitimate backing. As one informant from Gbarnga voiced it: *“We are blessed here because they (the UN) are in place to secure the peace”* (Hezekiah, Gbarnga Regional Hub. Gbarnga. Interview December 9, 2013). In his opinion, people in Liberia as a whole appreciate UNMIL, but especially in the rural areas as the UN has a heavier presence than the Liberia National Police.

Correspondingly, a UN employee (although perhaps biased) noted:

Just seeing an UNMIL car makes them feel safe. The UN creates a lot of security and safety for a lot of people. They see them as something necessary. Some see them as very natural in the society, because they have been here so long, and they don't know what is gonna happen when they leave

(Linnea, Peacebuilding Advisor, UNMIL. Monrovia. Interview December 3, 2013).

Hence, the point is not that there is not a legitimacy problem in terms of the UN succeeding in fully taking into account the particular contextual circumstances in Liberia (sociological legitimacy), it is more that this problem is shoved away in favor of other more urgent concerns such as covering basic needs, and creating a secure environment. Thus, at the end of the day it appears to be a matter of priorities. Maybe there are norms that the UN supports that are not well regarded in Liberia, but this may become less important compared to that of having a security provider and having the most basic needs fulfilled.

Looking at the above information, overall, it once again appears that it is not a question of “yes, the UN enjoys legitimacy in eyes of the Liberian population and peacebuilding actors”, or “no, the UN does not enjoy legitimacy”. What constitutes a source of legitimacy varies according to different actors. For some, a provider of basic needs is a legitimate actor, for others, a provider of security is. Considering information given in interviews stating that often Liberians feel that the UN is imposing international values on them and that their identity is threatened (Linnea); that there is a fear of culture being taken away among them (Roman, Rule of Law Officer, UNMIL. Monrovia. Interview December 6, 2013); and that some are saying that human rights are against their culture (Joseph, Human Rights Advisor, UNMIL. Monrovia. Interview November 13, 2013), there does seem to be a sociological legitimacy problem. Interviewees have furthermore noted that community elders are accusing the government for selling out to the west (Nathan, Political Affairs Officer, UNMIL. Monrovia. Interview November 12, 2013); that UN Personnel are perceived as being ‘brainwashed’, causing trouble, and *“doing more harm than good”* (Edward, Senior Peacebuilding

Advisor, PBO. Monrovia. Interview November 11, 2013); and that the UN “*will come into town (...) as an alternative authority*” postulating that they “*know what you need*” (Kwesi, Ghanaian academic. Accra. Interview July 10, 2014). The anger and frustration with the UN as expressed by the woman from Bong Women for Development in Gbarnga, who stated that “*you white people you come here and you tell us what to do*” (Gbarnga. Interview December 10, 2013) moreover indicate that this legitimacy problem is not a problem that should be neglected. Citations like these illustrate the existence of opposition towards the UN on grounds of perceiving the UN as an overruling organ.

On the contrary, the UN has also been described as ‘saviors’, and providers of security, and quotations such as: “*we got peace through the UN family*” (Member of Bong Peace Committee. Gbarnga. Interview December 10, 2013) also highlights the appreciation of the UN and consent of Liberians.

Hence, at the end of the day, this all serves to show that peacebuilding is a dynamic process through which some actors, norms and institutions are empowered and strengthened while other are weakened. Some structures will be connected globally, while others will be disconnected, some international norms will be utilized to claim rights domestically, and others will be utilized entrench national/continental normative differences. The relationship between the universal as embodied by the UN, and the local as exemplified by the case of Liberia illustrates that the two cannot be regarded as separated, but must be understood as friction. Legitimacy in this perspective is determined by one’s experience in this process. This friction between the universal scheme of the UN and the particularistic features of Liberia is an intertwined process, which can unfold in a variety of ways.

5.9 Conclusion

This chapter started out by empirically illustrating the infeasibility of applying a one-size-fits-all formula to countries where there already exist legitimate customary systems that do not fit into a typical Weberian state. This was done by showing how the customary system in Liberia enjoys a high degree of sociological legitimacy in the eyes of the population. This legitimacy is tied to lack of decentralization and endemic corruption in the statutory system, as well as the ability of the customary system, not only to serve as a law enforcing mechanism, but also to reflect norms of Liberia, and secure reconciliation and continuation of local communities. Considering the criticisms, the UN has been subject to on grounds of applying a Western-biased template for implementing peace through peacebuilding operations, expectedly, the UN would attempt to

eliminate these customary authorities and institutions and substitute them with institutions resembling those of the West. According to various interviewees in Liberia (both locals and UN personnel), the UN is *not* trying to defeat the customary system. On the contrary, the UN recognized the role of the customary system in ‘sharing the burden’ with the statutory system of providing justice, for instance by being present in rural areas where the statutory system is little accessible. Additionally, entities within the UN that are designed to localize peacebuilding, and the notion that many peacebuilders are from non-Western countries have largely been neglected. Hence, while the ‘rules of engagement’ of UN might resemble a non-flexible recipe of introducing liberal market democracies and human rights in post-conflict theatres, the findings in Liberia suggest that the UN perhaps in practice is more flexible than what critics give the organization credit for being. The findings add nuances to the overall discussion of the legitimacy of the UN.

With regards to the UN’s objective of implementing human rights in various particularistic settings, it was shown how human rights can both serve as a tool of empowerment in the struggle of ridding a society of harmful traditional practices, as well as create societal antibodies responding negatively to what is perceived as Western imposition of so-called universal norms *threatening* Liberian values. In other words, the friction between the universal and the particularistic has a variety of ways of unfolding. At times the dynamic between the two will cause ‘adaptation’ of the particular to the universal by empowerment, while at other times, the very same concept can create ‘rejection’ of the universal and solidify the particular, a process Robertson has named *glocalization* (Robertson, 1995).

These dynamics, are tied to notions of identity. As shown, the promotion of human rights in Liberia caused some Liberians to fear being stripped of culture and norms they see as being the very fabric that constitutes them as a person, Liberia as a country, and Africa as a continent are made up of. This kind of friction produces resilience. Hence, the more some of these rights are ‘pushed’ forward, the more people not identifying with them will push back. This kind of dynamic reappears both when discussing clitoridectomy in the Sande bush schools, the attitude towards the rights of LGBTi peoples, as well as the rights of children. This notion furthermore exemplifies that the Liberian population is not tabula rasa. They actively engage with norms and institutions promoted by the UN. They do not passively accept them; they interact with them.

Similarly, this discussion sheds light to the notion that it is not human rights as a whole that is ill-perceived, but only a few of them. Additionally, even those that are ill-perceived are not ill-perceived by the Liberian population as a whole. The Liberian population is not a sheep-like homogenous

group that all share opinions, and it is this kind of complexity that needs to be taken into consideration in the peacebuilding literature.

In terms of the *imposing factor*, some UN principles are perhaps imposed (those labelled by the UN as harmful traditional practices, such as clitoridecomy), while others are not (the UN did make space for justice mechanisms executed by the customary system).

Another finding of this study, pertains to methodology, which plays a major role in terms of the 'imposing factor'. Applying a humble approach characterized by a willingness to listen rather than talking, advising rather than pointing fingers, and mentoring on how to execute tasks rather than actually executing tasks, all serve to affect the extent to which the work of the UN is perceived as imposition. Showing a willingness to 'accommodate' or 'respect' existing institutions and norms may similarly affect the attitude of the population towards the mission. Referring to national laws rather than to abstract universal principles can increase the degree to which these principles resonate with Liberians, and educating people so that they understand and agree is much more likely to make the work of the UN self-sustainable after the UN withdraws.

Finally, accounts of UN peacebuilding involving either presenting the endeavor as a benevolent, although ethnocentric attempt at making peace and 'civilizing' non-Western populations, or as an endeavor with the purpose of keeping in check populations dissatisfied with the current global economic inequality, left this author with the assumption that UN peacebuilding inherently produced legitimacy problems. Findings at the fieldwork however, suggest that legitimacy for Liberians on ground, is tied to priorities. In the aftermath of fourteen years of civil war, security and having basic needs covered may play a bigger role in determining the degree to which the UN enjoys legitimacy, than norms and values. In other words, as some Liberians expressed, perhaps the UN does not excel in understanding the particularistic context of Liberia, but considering the circumstances at the time when the mission was deployed, this was not what was important: "*What concerns you at that time is to have something to eat*" (Adolphus. Biology student. Monrovia. Interview October 14, 2013).

6 Conclusion

Peacebuilding is no heavenly formula for peace on earth. As an instrument of coercive global liberal governance it even creates new conflicts and dependency. Nonetheless, the objective of assisting conflict-ridden societies is crucial. Only by recognizing its ethical and political limitations can peacebuilding rise from its fall and claim this ideal.

(Lidén 2009:631)

This chapter will summarize the main findings of the study and relate these to the main research question and theoretical framework outlined earlier in this thesis. Subsequently, it will consider how the findings can contribute to theory-developing, by reviewing aspects of this case that can form a basis for generalization. Finally, it will be suggested how future research can add to the understanding of the connection between legitimacy and sustainability of peacebuilding efforts after the drawdown of the mission.

As stated in the introduction, the mainstream perception and presentation of UN peacebuilding is that it is founded on the benevolent objective of wanting to establish peace, democracy, human rights and liberal market economies in post-conflict countries. Lately, however, both the practical and ideological underpinnings of peacebuilding have been put under scrutiny for suffering from lack of legitimacy caused by an inability/unwillingness to tailor interventions to the context of the recipient country, being a novel attempt of ‘civilizing’ countries emerging from civil war, and for being a deceptive expression of neo-imperialism in disguise. Rather than localizing peacebuilding efforts, the UN has been criticized for implementing a stereotypical Weberian state, which involves trying to implement democracy by undemocratic means, ensuring state sovereignty by allowing external actors to assume control, and building local capacity by allowing foreign agencies to take over.

With this in mind, the research question for this study has been: *How does the UN’s approach to peacebuilding relate to the Liberian context? And what factors are important in establishing UN legitimacy?*

The research reveals both arguments in support of, and in opposition to, the notion that the UN is suffering from lack of legitimacy. In that sense, it offers a building block to the understanding of potentials for legitimacy as well as pitfalls in UN peacebuilding. These nuances should be taken into consideration both in academic debates, as well as within the peacebuilding community.

The following sections will highlight the main findings, and account for their implications for the already established theoretical assumptions advocating and questioning the legitimacy of peacebuilding.

6.1 Main findings

When I started working with this thesis, undoubtedly influenced by having read background literature on UN peacebuilding, I had clear expectations that if a UN mission was not perceived as being in line with the local context and values, it would not enjoy legitimacy in the eyes of the population. However, going on fieldwork and talking to people on the ground drew to my attention the nuances and complexities in perceptions of legitimacy. Legitimacy in UN peacebuilding is more complicated than as such, and there are important grey zones and complex dynamics to take into consideration before dismissing the legitimacy of UN peacebuilding on the basis of having read material by the hyper-critical school of peacebuilding authors.

Firstly, how does the UN's approach to peacebuilding relate to the Liberian context? In contrast to the criticism the UN has been subject to on grounds of applying an extremely narrow recipe for peacebuilding, the empirical findings show that, while some interviewees affirmed that the UN is applying a template that has seen little change the last twenty years, others voiced that in their experience they had only seen efforts at reconciling the customary and statutory system. In that sense, the UN does have a non-flexible formula in terms of their peacebuilding missions being founded on the objective of wanting post countries to liberalize politically, socially and economically, in practice however, they adapt to the circumstances and work with the customary institutions that are in place. On the basis of this, with regards to legitimacy, it appears that normative legitimacy is compromised in the sense that the aim of UN peacebuilding is characterized by leaving little room for local actors to set the overall agenda. However, the means in this regard do in fact enjoy sociological legitimacy, as the mission, when deployed, does adapt to local circumstances. Additionally, looking into the Civil Affairs section of the UN furthermore shows the UN has components designed specifically with the purpose of adapting peacebuilding, and that non-Westerners are approximately as represented as Westerners in Civil Affairs. In that sense, cutting peacebuilders across the board can be seriously misleading and lead to unjustified criticism.

Secondly, investigating how the UN's approach to peacebuilding relate to the Liberian context has furthermore showed that the human rights component of the UN is somewhat inconsistent with

some of the practices and attitudes in Liberia. Clitoridectomy, rights of LGBTi peoples, and the rights of children were extracted as examples of this inconsistency. How the friction between the objectives of the UN and that of the Liberian population manifests itself, and ways in which Liberians engage with these inconsistencies vary. In some cases, the concept of UN human rights in some instances can serve as a tool of empowerment for those whose rights are being violated. In other cases, this same concept may produce local resistance in response to what is regarded as Western imposition of values, and consequently counter-sentiments towards the scheme of the UN may arise.

Findings furthermore suggest that this kind of resistance is especially likely to occur, when UN norms are perceived as infringing on people's sense of identity. People will fight hard to protect something seen as constituting the foundation of their very self and avoid being stripped of the fabric that they are made up of. Counter-reactions towards the human rights scheme in that sense is based on a desire for self-preservation. Friction between 'international' and 'local' norms in this regard, can be understood as producing resilience of identities. Perspectives on clitoridectomy, homosexuality, and childrearing practices in Liberia correspondingly appear to be an expression of identity-related issues.

Another finding of this study, pertains to methodology, which plays a major role in terms of the degree to which the UN is perceived as imposing its objectives. Applying a humble approach characterized by a willingness to listen, advising and mentoring rather than solitarily setting the agenda and pointing fingers, reduce the 'imposition factor'. Referring to national laws rather than to abstract universal principles can increase the extent to which these principles resonate with Liberians' worldview, and educating people so that they understand and agree in the objectives of the UN, is much more likely to make the work of the UN self-sustainable after the UN withdraws.

Overall, with regards to legitimacy, accounts of UN peacebuilding involving either presenting the endeavor as a benevolent, although ethnocentric attempt at making peace and 'civilizing' non-Western populations, or as an endeavor with the purpose of keeping in check populations dissatisfied with the current global economic inequality, left this author with the assumption that UN peacebuilding inherently produced legitimacy problems. Findings at the fieldwork however, suggest that legitimacy for Liberians on ground, is tied to priorities. In the aftermath of fourteen years of civil war, security and having basic needs covered may play a bigger role in determining the degree to which the UN enjoys legitimacy, than whether the UN's universal scheme is in line with Liberian norms and values. In other words, as some Liberians expressed, perhaps the UN

does not excel in understanding the particularistic context of Liberia, but considering the circumstances and security situation at the time when the mission was deployed, this was not what was important: “*What concerns you at that time is to have something to eat*” (Adolphus. Biology student. Monrovia. Interview October 14, 2013). Similarly, this author expected that statistical analyses suggesting that peacebuilding interventions have increased instability rather than creating peace in post-conflict theatres would affect perceptions of UN legitimacy on the ground. It appears however, that this kind of normative legitimacy is the concern of academics, more than the concern of ‘ordinary’ Liberians, who have not been exposed to this literature. In that sense, this kind of normative legitimacy, did not appear to influence overall perceptions of sociological legitimacy on the ground.

Additionally, contrary to both the hyper-critical school of thought that is presenting liberal peacebuilding missions as characterized solely by imposition, but also contrary to the liberal strand that is presenting peacebuilding missions as pure philanthropy, the picture is not black and white. It appears that on some issues, the UN is unwilling to compromise, for instance when cultural practices are classified as being harmful traditional practices, and on other issues, like allowing for local justice mechanisms to exist, the UN is accommodative. Investigating this more thoroughly and identifying which components of the mission, or which norms of the UN that are perceived as being imposed, is crucial in order for the UN to tailor its missions to local contexts. In this context, it should be emphasized that it is not human rights as a package that is ill-perceived, but some components of human rights. Mapping out contentious issues and dynamics feeding aversions against the UN will allow the mission to show more methodological sensitivity and design context-specific approaches to meet these circumstances, and hence, increase legitimacy.

UN peacebuilding is a magnificent machinery, hence, the UN’s approach relates to the Liberian context in a such way that UN processes will empower some, while disempowering others, some will be connected to the global, while others will be disconnected, some norms are adapted, while others are rejected, some norms are imposed, while others are left untouched. Legitimacy in this regards, will be highly dependent on one’s experience in this process. Perspectives on clitoridectomy, homosexuality, and childrearing differ, and correspondingly do perspectives on UN legitimacy. This friction between the universal scheme of the UN and the particularistic features of Liberia is a dynamic process, which can manifest itself in a wide spectrum of ways. These realizations furthermore underlines the feasibility of applying ethnographic methods. Had this thesis without executing a fieldtrip, I am sure many of these nuances had gone lost.

On a personal note, the fieldtrip to Liberia was an eye-opener in terms of realizing that the emphasis I have put on cultural values is an emphasis that I have been able to afford only by virtue of being born into a very convenient situation. All of my basic needs have always been fulfilled, I have never been destitute, and I have not experienced the incomprehensible horrors of war. Going to Liberia was a brutal confrontation with the fact that for instance being fortunate enough to study, ending up in anthropology has shaped my emphasis on culture, values and ideology. These priorities seem to come second when you grow up under other circumstances. Perhaps standing firm on values and ideology is in many ways a luxury that can only be afforded by the affluent, a luxury that will have to be deprioritized when facing massive international assistance in the wake of a civil war?

6.2 The wider relevance of results

How can Liberia be utilized to shed light on other cases? As mentioned in Chapter 3, case studies like this may have relevance to other cases and can thereby play a role in formulating generalizations and generating theory.

On a general note, even though the focus of this thesis pertains only to peacebuilding, and only to the case of Liberia, it is still relevant to overall discussions on international governance. If liberal peacebuilding suffers from a normative legitimacy problem, this is likely also to influence other kinds of interventions launched in the name of democracy and human rights, such as peace operations executed by other actors, humanitarian interventions and forcible regime change.

More specifically, the findings of this study suggests that the UN, despite having an overall formula for peacebuilding might prove more pragmatic and accommodative than assumed, when implementing its policies on the ground. Moreover, this study shows that ‘forcing’ so-called universal norms down the ‘throat’ of a host-country, can produce local resistance, especially if these norms are infringing on features that people associate with their identities, thereby undermining the sociological legitimacy of the UN. The methodology of the UN is also likely to influence perceptions of UN legitimacy in other peacebuilding cases. Finally, it can be assumed that the notion that priorities in peacebuilding influence perceptions of UN legitimacy, is also likely to be applicable to other cases. Hence, identifying the most urgent needs will be an indicator of focus areas that will increase legitimacy.

It is beyond the scope of this thesis to thoroughly go into the characteristics of other peacebuilding cases. I can therefore only hint at what these results can be used to shed light on.

6.3 Looking forward

As mentioned in the introductory chapter, the focus on friction between the UN's universal scheme and the particularistic context of Liberia, and the ways this friction manifests itself in terms of legitimacy, stems from the concern, that if the objectives of the mission do not resonate with the host-society, to what extent will they then continue to sustain the work the UN initiated after the withdrawal of the mission?

As the mission is still in existence, despite being in a phase of drawdown, it is too early to say with certainty to what extent local actors will maintain the institutions and norms that UN has sought to implement. However, as this thesis has shown, it is not too early to investigate attitudes towards the mission, that is likely to influence the sustainability of the UN's efforts. Future research should examine the effect the Liberian population's perceptions of the mission's legitimacy has on the durability of UNMIL.

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8 Appendix

8.1 List of Informants

Adolphus, (2013). Liberian biology student. Monrovia. Interview with author. October 14.

Bong Peace Committee, (2013). Liberian CSO. Gbarnga. Focus group discussion with author. December 10.

Bong Women for Development, (2013). Liberian CSO. Gbarnga. Focus group discussion with author. December 10.

David, (2013). NRC employee. Gbarnga. Personal correspondence with author. December 10.

Edward, (2013). Senior Peacebuilding Advisor PBO. Monrovia. Interview with author. November 11.

Hezekiah, (2013). Manager, Regional Justice and Security Hub. Gbarnga. Interview with author. December 9.

Joao & Roman, (2013). Human Rights Officer and Rule of Law Officer, UNMIL. Monrovia. Interview with author. December 6.

Joseph, (2013). Human Rights Advisor, UNMIL. Monrovia. Interview with author. November 13.

Kwesi, (2014). Ghanaian academic. Accra. Interview with author. July 10.

Linnea, (2013). Peacebuilding Advisor, UNMIL. Monrovia. Interview with author. December 3

Nathan, (2013). Political Affairs Officer, UNMIL. Monrovia. Interview with author. November 12

Nathaniel, (2013). Consultant, PBO. Monrovia. Interview with author. October 23

Patric, (2013). Corrections, UNMIL. Monrovia. Interview with author. December 4

Susannah, (2013). Liberian woman. Gbarnga. Interview with author. December 11

Thomas, (2014). Liberian academic. Accra. Interview with author. July 11

Vacus, (2013). NRC employee. Gbarnga. Personal correspondence. December 13

8.2 Interview Guide

How would you describe Liberians' role in planning the UN peacebuilding mission?

To what extent do you feel that people from Liberia determine the agenda of the mission?

In what ways would you say that the UN peacebuilding initiatives reflect Liberian values/your values?

In what ways would you say that they do not?

If you were a victim of crime in this country, who would you go to first for assistance?

(The police, a traditional leader or traditional court, a powerful local person, the family of the perpetrator, your friends or family, local government official or other?).

What tasks does the UN execute that normally lies within the field of the government?

What divides the people in Liberia in terms of what values/institutions they think the UN should promote?

How have you felt the presence of UNMIL in your daily life?

What happens if the UN wants to implement/introduce something Liberians disagree with?